CHAPTER 10

Best Practices in Comprehension Instruction

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This chapter will:

- Describe the role of social context in comprehension instruction.
- Discuss the importance of scaffolding during comprehension instruction.
- Discuss the importance of teaching readers to be strategic versus teaching strategies.
- Assert that metacognition is crucial as readers become transformed into strategic learners.

"I have been a teacher for 26 years and I have seen various reform initiatives come and go. I feel like I have seen it all. But this is the first time that I have felt so heavily mandated in everything I do. Everyone is watching me to see if I follow the prescribed lessons that tell me what strategies to teach on what days and how to introduce and utilize those strategies within my classroom. The sad thing is, though, I am not being watched to see when and how I teach those strategies so the children will benefit. I am being watched so my school can say that every teacher taught a specific comprehension strategy so when testing comes along, if we don't do well, everyone can just say we did what we were told to do."—*Fourth-grade elementary school teacher*

This vignette highlights how many teachers feel within today's educational climate. This teacher's perception of how she is being mandated to teach represents a systemic problem in the approach that schools are taking in how they implement comprehension strategies. The conversation has drastically changed from teaching what is best for the students, in a way that is differentiated to meet every child's needs, to an overarching understanding of teaching that expects all students to learn at the same pace, at the same time, and use the same strategies in the same way. Such a conception of education has removed all notions of context from the discussion surrounding what exemplifies best practices.

This teacher's narrative highlights the importance of changing the conversation surrounding strategy instruction specifically related to comprehension. The first section of this chapter reviews what the current research has to say about comprehension, while the second section describes the fundamental changes that need to take place to recontextualize comprehension as a means of cultivating strategic and reflective learners. The third section highlights small adjustments that can be made within literacy classrooms to foster an environment that is conducive to a "transformational view" of strategy instruction.

EVIDENCE-BASED BEST PRACTICES

Comprehension is critical for successful reading. While the ability to decode words and read with fluency is also necessary for successful reading, and vital *for* comprehension, the ability to decode by itself is not sufficient to ensure successful comprehension. Throughout the 1990s there was pressure to teach all children how to read by grade 3. This led to the No Child Left Behind legislation that ultimately created Reading First. This educational reform shaped the nature of instructional practice in the 2000s and was predicated on the theoretical notion that decoding skills alone, or at least in large part, are sufficient to lead to high levels of comprehension. This theoretical premise derives from automaticity theory (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Samuels, 2004) and is known as the bottleneck hypothesis (Fleisher, Jenkins, & Pany, 1979). Hoover and Gough's (1990) "simple view" of reading followed a similar theoretical premise, arguing that skilled reading consisted simply of decoding and linguistic comprehension. While Reading First programs were intended to provide explicit instruction in phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, *and* comprehension, ensuing instructional practice focused largely on phonics, phonemic awareness, and fluency. Thus instructional practice during that time was guided largely by automaticity theory and the simple view of reading. Ultimately, however, when the final report of Reading First's results were released, findings indicated that these code-based interventions had no significant impact on comprehension for children in grades 1, 2, or 3 (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008). Almasi, Palmer, Madden, and Hart's

(2011) recent review of research on interventions that foster narrative comprehension for struggling readers found similar results. Those interventions focused solely on decoding and/or fluency were not as successful at enhancing comprehension as interventions that included both decoding and comprehension instruction. Furthermore, interventions that focused exclusively on comprehension were consistently successful at enhancing comprehension. While decoding is critical for reading, these recent research findings should put to rest the notion that an instructional emphasis on decoding (i.e., phonics and phonemic awareness) by itself, or even in large part, leads to significant effects on comprehension—it does not.

In contrast, successful comprehension instruction *must* consist of instruction that includes explicit instruction focused on comprehension. Most of the comprehension-focused interventions in the Almasi et al. (2011) review sought to improve comprehension via strategy instruction. However, definitions of "strategy" and "strategy instruction" vary widely among practitioners and researchers.

For the purposes of this synthesis, strategies will be defined as cognitive and metacognitive processes that are deliberately and consciously employed as a means of attaining a goal (Almasi, 2003; Hacker, 2004; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983; Pressley, Borkowski, & Schneider, 1989). Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) distinguished strategies from skills by noting that intentionality, awareness, and goal directedness are the hallmarks of strategic action:

> Reading strategies are deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text. Reading skills are automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency and usually occur without awareness of the components or control involved. The reader's deliberate control, goal directedness, and awareness define a strategic action. Control and working toward a goal characterize the strategic reader who selects a particular path to a reading goal. (p. 368)

Almasi (2003) focused her definition of strategies as "actions that are selected deliberately by an individual to attain a goal" (p. 1), the key aspect of this definition being that strategic behaviors are actions employed by an agentic individual. Often, educators speak of strategies as if they are nouns rather than actions. This may be because much of the early research on strategy instruction focused on identifying what good and poor readers did while reading to enhance their comprehension. These "good and poor reader studies" helped the field understand what good readers were thinking and doing while reading (e.g., August, Flavell, & Clift, 1984; Davey, 1988; Gambrell, Wilson, & Gantt, 1981; Garner & Kraus, 1981; Garner & Reis, 1981; Paris & Myers, 1981; Recht & Leslie, 1988). Instructional practice based on these findings attempted to teach struggling readers to engage in those strategies that good readers did while reading. This led to a number of research studies in

which interventions were aimed at teaching students how to use these strategies. Typically these strategies were taught in isolation and they were taught quickly—sometimes over the course of a few lessons or a few weeks.

Reviews of these studies (e.g., Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Bakken, & Whedon, 1996; National Reading Panel, 2000; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991; Pearson & Dole, 1987; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Pressley, 2000; Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita, 1989) identified a number of powerful strategies that had significant effects on comprehension, including comprehension monitoring, constructing mental images, identifying story grammar components, generating questions while reading, and summarizing. Inadvertently, these studies may have led to current instructional practice in which strategies are often taught one at a time and in isolation. The other inadvertent outcome that may have emerged is that, due to the isolated nature of the instruction, teachers often prompted students to employ the strategy rather than encouraging students to make their own decisions about whether to use the strategy. The results of these studies have shown that students are able to learn how to use strategies such as visualizing (Chan, Cole, & Morris, 1990; Flaro, 1987); comprehension monitoring (Baumann, Seifert-Kessell, & Jones, 1992); identifying story grammar (Boulineau, Fore, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2004; Newby, Caldwell, & Recht, 1989; Idol, 1987; Idol & Croll, 1987); and summarizing (Borkowski, Weyhing, & Carr, 1988; Mastropieri et al., 2001) to improve short-term comprehension, but over time these comprehension gains were not sustained.

Furthermore, research has also shown that the ability of such short-term, isolated strategy instruction to yield long-term benefits and transfer to all reading contexts is questionable (Almasi et al., 2011; Pressley, 2000). Many of these early studies did not provide students with the type of explicit instruction that enables them to internalize the strategic processing necessary to transfer what they learned to other contexts. Instruction that fosters transfer includes opportunities for readers to talk about not only the strategies they use, but also the conditions under which they may or may not use them. That is, readers must think about and consider where, when, and why they might use a strategy as they make decisions about whether to use it to meet their reading goal.

In short, these early studies focused on teaching students the "strategy" rather than teaching students "to be strategic." Subsequently, teachers have come to focus on strategies as things to be taught, rather than as actions to be fostered. The difference is that strategic actions require intentionality—they require a reader who is actively processing the text and making decisions (Afflerbach et al., 2008; Paris et al., 1991; Pressley, Borkowski, et al., 1989). Such readers continually monitor the reading experience and consciously make decisions as to where, when, how, and why they should apply strategic behaviors and actions (e.g., activating background knowledge to make connections, visualizing, making predictions, setting purposes, identifying text

structure, monitoring comprehension, summarizing) as warranted by the conditions surrounding the reading event. Thus teaching readers to be strategic not only involves teaching them about the strategy, but also about the conditions under which one might *use* the strategy. Those conditions include giving consideration to reader factors, textual factors, and contextual factors.

Reader factors include aspects such as reading ability, ethnicity, identity, physiology, socioeconomic status, language, experiences, gender, age, affect, motivation, and fatigue. The characteristics one brings to the reading event influence the meaning one constructs and are unique to each individual (Marshall, 2000).

Textual factors can include both linguistic (e.g., printed or electronic text of any form) and semiotic (e.g., signs, symbols, language, gestures, music, art) forms (Hartman, 1995). Alexander and Jetton (2000) also distinguish between linear and nonlinear texts, the distinguishing feature being that in linear texts processing decisions are left to the reader, whereas in nonlinear texts the discourse processing decisions are in part determined by the computer- or Web-based links associated with a particular text. As well, textual factors include more traditional features such as genre, readability, and concept density.

Contextual factors involve the setting in which the reading event occurs. This means that the reader gives consideration to, and may need to adapt to local, sociocultural, and/or sociohistorical aspects of context (Marshall, 2000). The local setting reflects particular instructional methods, activities, or tasks within a literacy classroom. The literacy classroom is situated within a school, which is situated within a larger community. This local context is situated socioculturally in that it is affiliated with the beliefs, values, rites, and obligations of those living within the larger community and the nation. The local setting is also situated sociohistorically in that the beliefs, values, rites, and obligations that preceded it affect it.

The ability to use a reading strategy to improve comprehension is thus far more difficult when the ultimate goal is to teach students to be strategic. It involves not only teaching students about the strategy, but also about the subtle nuances related to analyzing the reading task and making decisions about which strategies might best be suited for particular purposes, at particular times, and under particular circumstances. Such instruction cannot be done in a couple of lessons. Thus researchers developed interventions that taught readers how to use *sets* of strategies rather than individual strategies. These interventions focused on teaching students how to recognize where and when they should use strategies, how to select from a variety of strategies, and how to determine whether their choices were moving them toward their goal: comprehension (Almasi et al., 2011; National Reading Panel, 2000; Paris et al., 1991; Pressley, 2000). Reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), informed strategies for learning (Paris, Cross, & Lipson, 1984; Paris & Jacobs, 1984; Paris & Oka, 1986), and transactional strategies instruction (Anderson, 1992; R. Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; Pressley,

El-Dinary, et al., 1992) are examples of interventions that teach students not only how to flexibly use a cohesive set of strategies, but also to develop metacognitive awareness of the task and self that fosters self-initiated and self-regulated strategy use. Research has shown that each of these interventions has proven successful with readers at various age levels, and some have shown that they lead to sustained and significant growth in comprehension over time (R. Brown et al., 1996; Van Keer, 2004; Westra & Moore, 1995). Recent research has also indicated that teaching strategies one at a time was not as effective as teaching them as a set as in transactional strategies instruction (Reutzel, Smith, & Fawson, 2005).

As a result of these research findings, core reading programs (i.e., basal reading programs) published in the past decade have incorporated much of the research related to comprehension strategies instruction (Pilonieta, 2010). However, as Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) found, the five most widely used commercial core reading programs do not provide the type of explicit instruction or the gradual release of responsibility that is foundational to comprehension strategies instruction. Furthermore, Dewitz, Leahy, Jones, and Sullivan (2010) found these publications woefully inadequate in their attempt to provide students with the procedural and conditional knowledge associated with strategy use. What continues to be problematic is that teachers tend to misunderstand what strategic processing involves, focus on isolated strategy use rather than strategic processing, and focus on activities rather than strategies. Teachers may engage students in an activity, but they do not provide the requisite instructional elements to teach *strategic processing*. Very often the teacher actually performs the strategy but does not teach the students how to use the strategy independently. That is, a teacher may set a purpose for reading rather than teach the students how, when, and why they should set their own purposes while reading. Thus students are not actively engaged in the decision-making process regarding what strategies to use and when to use them. As a result they do not learn to become planful, self-regulated readers who possess a repertoire of strategies to assist them as they read. Struggling readers in particular are at a disadvantage in this scenario.

In summary, the previous review of reading comprehension research provided an overview of two generations of comprehension strategies research that has led to two different perspectives on instruction. The first perspective is what we will call the "isolation view," in which strategies are taught in isolation and their use is often prompted by teachers. A common metaphor is that readers acquire a "toolbox" full of different strategies (Almasi, 2003). From this perspective the strategies, or "tools," that are used by the reader are outside of the reader (metaphorically, they are kept in a toolbox or in a tool belt) and accessed when needed. A more knowledgeable other, such as a teacher, might even let you know which tool to select and when to use it: "Today we're going to learn about the parts of a story. Stories include setting, characters, plot, and a solution. Here is a story map for you to fill out after you read the story. It will help you remember what you have read."

The "transformational view," which is what this chapter encourages, is a perspective that emphasizes the importance of teaching strategies in a manner that enables students to *become* strategic. Just as a Transformers action figure can morph from a car to a robot whose body parts can change into a variety of mechanical tools and weapons, readers engage with strategies until they become a part of them. They are no longer reaching for a tool from a toolbox that is outside of them, they actually *are* the tools. The tools are within themselves and the student must consider reader factors, textual factors, and contextual factors to determine what strategy works best in a given situation. The reader actually embodies the tools/strategies. That is, the reader becomes the tools/strategies and the tools/strategies become the reader. The reader is transformed by using the strategies. Teachers from this perspective do not tell readers when to use a strategy; instead, they might say things like, "Today we are going to read a story. What strategies or tools might we use as we are reading to help us understand the story?" This would be followed by a discussion among the students as to different types of strategies that they might use to help them as they read. The section that follows provides further explanation of what these best practices look like in action.

BEST PRACTICES IN ACTION

The lack of coherence between reading programs and research-based strategies instruction has led to a disconnect between content and learning. Core reading programs like the ones evaluated by Dewitz et al. (2009) establish a precedent as to how comprehension instruction will occur within classrooms. Within the environments perpetuated by such reading programs, content is seen as prescriptive. It removes the social context of learning and expects all students to use the same strategies, in the same way, for the same outcome. Learners are viewed as separate from the context of learning. Such separation between content and learning is leading to a different understanding of how people conceptualize the process of learning.

Understanding the various perspectives associated with the learning process are important to consider as best literacy practices are discussed. Underlying these varied perspectives on learning is the manner in which one views the nature of knowledge. In philosophy this is known as epistemology (i.e., the study of the nature and scope of knowledge) (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996). Epistemology has been used within education to explore learning more thoroughly by providing a framework from which belief systems related to knowledge and learning are more readily understood. Specifically, epistemology is focused on three overarching concerns: "what constitutes or counts as knowledge, where knowledge is located, and how knowledge is attained" (p. 40). When discussing the reading programs or strategies instruction, these questions can be used to situate the learner within the process of learning. For example, the first question—*What constitutes or counts as knowledge?*—

relates to how a person situates truth in relation to a learner. Can various learners understand things differently? Can they use a strategy in multiple ways, or is there only one absolute way/place/circumstance in which to use a strategy?

The second question—*Where is knowledge located?*—is important because it asks a person to consider where learners are in relation to what they are learning. Is your goal as a teacher to "fill the vessel," or is your goal as the teacher to "cultivate the mind"? One perspective places knowledge outside of the learner, while the other perspective allows for knowledge to be embodied by the learner.

The final question—*How is knowledge attained?*—is directly related to discovery versus creation as it relates to learning. Within a learning environment, does learning occur through discovery, or is the creation of knowledge emphasized? Can learners find or be given knowledge, or do they have to create understanding for themselves and transform their own thinking before knowledge is created? The first outlook removes the learner from the process of creating knowledge, while the second perspective acknowledges learners as active agents within their own process of creating meaning.

For the purposes of this chapter, the discussion of epistemology is important to highlight the two various perspectives discussed within the first section. One perspective, embraced by the most current reading programs, considers there to be one absolute truth, located outside of the learner, that is waiting to be discovered by the learner. The other viewpoint acknowledges that based on prior experiences there is not going to be an absolute truth, learning does not happen outside of the learner. The learners' experiences and contexts matter as knowledge grows. And finally, knowledge cannot be discovered. True learning does not happen until the learner transforms and begins to embody the strategies they are being shown. They create an understanding about how to affectively utilize each strategy to meet their needs within various contexts. Table 10.1 outlines the conflicting perspectives associated with strategies instruction.

As highlighted in Table 10.1, the recent shift in education has started to change the underlying belief of what is valued within learning. The viewpoint that students are products detached from their own learning processes has overtaken our schools. As the National Reading Panel embraced the five areas of reading development: (1) phonemic awareness, (2) phonics, (3) fluency, (4) vocabulary, and (5) comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000), reading programs followed in line and perpetuated a decontextualized nature of teaching strategies in isolation (Dewitz et al., 2009). In terms of comprehensive literacy instruction, the push toward prescribed teaching as a means to reach annual yearly progress (AYP) has brought with it a mindset that emphasizes "the simple view" of reading comprehension (Carver, 1993; Hoover & Gough, 1990). Such a developmental perspective stresses individual skills such as decoding, listening, and fluency as steps to achieve comprehension. Hoffman (2009) stated that such a perspective might work for

TABLE 10.1. Dichotomous Perspectives on Strategies Instruction

	Perspective 1: Isolation view (core reading programs)	Perspective 2: Transformational view (strategies instruction model)
What constitutes or counts as knowledge?	One truth.	Multiple ways of knowing are embraced.
Where is knowledge located?	Located outside of learner.	Learning does not happen outside of learner.
How is knowledge attained?	Knowledge is discovered.	Knowledge is created.
Outcome	Heavily prescribed reading environment that views the learner as separate from learning. Learning focused on product not process.	Differentiated instruction is embraced. Use of strategies so learners are empowered to know when and how to use them to best meet their needs within a given context. Learning focused on process, not product.

Note. Based on Cunningham and Fitzgerald (1996).

literacy growth if literacy instruction and literacy learning were not such complex processes. The purpose of this chapter is to extend the conversation of comprehensive literacy instruction to recognize the social context of literacy learning as it relates to reading comprehension. As the research synthesized above has shown, teaching strategies as skills in isolation has not yielded long-term effects on comprehension.

In an effort to get to the root of the instructional problem, rather than focusing on the seven strategies that research has shown are most critical to comprehension, this chapter focuses on how to teach readers to be strategic, while recognizing the social nature of learning by highlighting the following key ingredients as a means of cultivating a classroom culture that values the learning process: (1) context, (2) agency/metacognition, and (3) scaffolding. Figure 10.1 illustrates how these elements work together to create a learning environment that foster independent, self-regulated strategy use.

This chapter attempts to change the conversation related to strategy instruction. Instead of focusing on individual skills and perpetuating the notion that strategies can be taught in isolation, Figure 10.1 highlights the need to shift from a list of seven strategies and associated skills to a more comprehensive and contextual view of how strategies can be implemented within a literacy environment so that students can become strategic and reflective.

The ideas that follow are based on Almasi's (2003) strategy instruction model and will help classroom teachers and interventionists identify critical features necessary for helping readers become strategic.

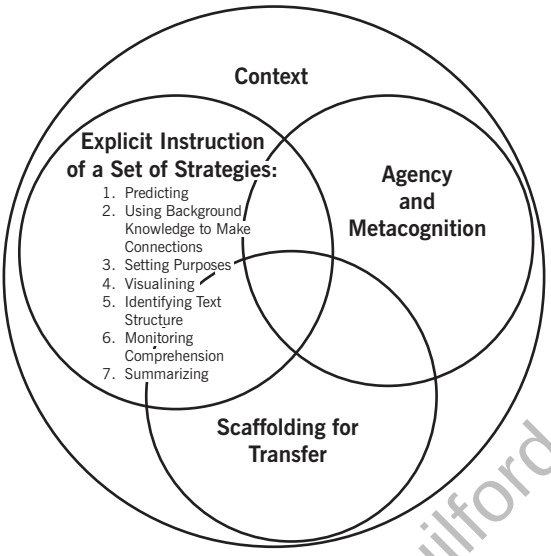

FIGURE 10.1. Key elements in a transformational view of comprehension strategy instruction.

Context

The instructional context in Figure 10.1 represents the overall instructional environment and everything contained within that environment. Context is critical for solid comprehension strategy instruction because it is through context that students become enculturated into the language of strategies, observe strategic behaviors and actions, and participate in strategic processing firsthand. Sociocultural perspectives on learning (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978) suggest that learning is a "cognitive apprenticeship" that occurs when learners are able to interact socially with others who might guide, support, or stretch their thinking so that they can learn how to use and implement the "tools of culture" (Rogoff, 1990, p. i) that will be needed. In an instructional context focused on comprehension, this means that students learn how to be strategic. The "tools" needed to be strategic in one context or culture might differ from those needed in another. For example, a reader might need different "tools" or act in a different manner when reading in an online environment than when reading traditional text (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu et al., 2008), or when reading in a Western society that places greater value on "school literacy" or "written literacy" than in a society that values "oral literacy," where a higher demand is placed on memory. Johnston (2004) has noted that classrooms are sites where "children are *becoming* literate" (p. 22). It is where they are developing social and personal identities about who they are as readers, writers, and thinkers. It is where they explore, try out, and try

on various ways of being, acting, and thinking as they negotiate their own identities. In this sense then, the classroom instructional context is a space in which readers author themselves (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), which means there is a great deal of playful experimentation needed, particularly as readers attempt new or different ways of accomplishing tasks and goals. This is not a space where there are "right" or "wrong" ways of "doing" reading or comprehending. It is a space where readers construct and build their own understanding of themselves and of what works for them and under what conditions. Thus the instructional context must be a safe space that is free of the hazards that lead children to become cautious, fearful, anxious, and passive participants in their own learning. Often such hazards arise when children are assessment focused or performance oriented, as Prawat (1989) described them. Their goal might be to "get done," which might lead them to rush through or skim a text so they finish, rather than engage in strategic behaviors that would assist their comprehension but cause them to take longer.

Creating a "safe" environment means creating a space in which it is "OK" to be uncertain or wrong, and in fact it is celebrated when students say, "I don't get it," or "I'm confused." The teacher's response, in a safe space, would be, "Wonderful! Owen, I'm so glad you were able to recognize when your reading doesn't make sense! That shows you are a good reader because you know when the text doesn't make sense! What didn't make sense to you?" In these classrooms, the teacher creates a safe space where students can openly discuss what they don't understand (cf. Almasi, 1995, 1996; Almasi, O'Flahavan, & Arya, 2001; Fall, Webb, & Chudowsky, 2000) and test new or different ways of making sense of text. These safe spaces include lots of opportunities for readers to talk with other readers about what texts they read, what they understood (or did not understand), and how they went about making sense of the text (e.g., what strategic processes they used, when they used them, where they used them, and why they used them). Teachers in these classrooms are not asking comprehension questions or noting who understood and who did not. Instead, teachers who create safe spaces make note of what strategic processing was being done, by whom, and under what circumstances.

In the above scenario, the teacher might ask other students whether they had a similar problem: "Did anyone else have difficulty understanding that part? Let's talk about what strategies we can use to help ourselves when the text doesn't make sense." The teacher might then use the teachable moment to begin a very brief explanation of "fix-up strategies" that we might use when the text doesn't make sense, such as rereading, reading ahead to clarify meaning, or discussing the difficult part with another person.

In addition to creating a safe instructional environment, another critical feature of context focuses on the nature of the instruction itself. Explicit instruction is represented in Figure 10.1 as a key element within the context. It is an aspect that is often heralded as being vital to best practice, but in reality does not occur. Explicit instruction involves teacher modeling, explana-

tion, and think-alouds that help children understand what strategic processes are, how to use them, under what conditions they might be used, and why they might be used. In the research literature this is known as declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge (Paris et al., 1983). In Figure 10.1 the seven research-based comprehension strategies are represented within explicit instruction as a list, but they should be thought of as a flexible and interconnected set of strategies. Teachers should teach this set of strategies using explanation, modeling, thinking aloud, and long-term guided practice in a variety of settings.

Brown (2008) found that the teachers trained to use transactional strategies instruction (TSI) provided much richer explanations of the processes involved in strategic thinking. The TSI teachers described the reasons for using particular strategies at particular times and the processes underlying their use. They also provided a great deal of modeling and verbalized about the thought processes they used while reading, whereas non-TSI teachers did not. In addition, TSI teachers provided commentary on and elaborated students' thought processes to take advantage of teachable moments.

In the example above, the teacher might provide an explanation of various fix-up strategies and then think aloud about how to use one of them in the context:

> "OK, so Owen said that he didn't understand what the author, Stephen Mooser, meant in the sentence 'Happy HICCUP Halloween.' That is confusing and it doesn't seem to make sense. When we are reading and the text doesn't make sense we can use our fix-up strategies. So I might think, 'Wait a second, that doesn't make sense. I'd better stop and use a fix-up strategy.' One fix-up strategy we can use is to read ahead slowly and see whether the meaning clears up. That just means reading ahead a little further and being very alert and cautious while I read. So as I read ahead slowly, I'm going to keep trying to think of that HICCUP in the middle of the sentence that didn't make sense and see whether the next couple of sentences help clarify the meaning. I'm going to try that."

The teacher would then continue by reading aloud from the text (in this example the text is Stephen Mooser's *The Ghost with the Halloween Hiccups*):

> "[reading aloud] 'Oh my,' said Laura. 'You have the hiccups.' 'All HICCUP day,' said Mr. Penny. [thinking aloud] OK, now I've read ahead a little further to see whether the meaning cleared up. I noticed that Laura told Mr. Penny that he had the hiccups. So I guess that means Mr. Penny has the hiccups. Then there is another odd sentence with HICCUP in the middle of it. I noticed that there are quotation marks around the sentence 'All HICCUP day,' and that usually means someone's talking. So if he has the hiccups and

> he's talking . . . well, that reminds me of when I have hiccups. Sometimes if I have hiccups and I try to talk, I hiccup in the middle of the sentence I'm trying to say. Maybe that's it! Could it be that the author, Stephen Mooser, is trying to show us how Mr. Penny was actually talking by inserting an actual HICCUP right in the middle of his sentence? Let me go back and reread that sentence and make a pretend HICCUP in the place where the word *hiccup* is capitalized, 'All [makes a hiccup sound] day.' Does that make sense now?"

In this think-aloud the teacher fluidly integrated several aspects of strategy instruction. She provided a *think-aloud* of what she might think while she was reading if that same sentence didn't make sense to her. Then she included an *explanation* of what one fix-up strategy, reading ahead, is and how to do it. She then *modeled* the fix-up strategy by reading ahead from the spot where Owen had difficulty. After she read aloud she actually used several comprehension strategies—she *summarized* what she read, *made a connection to her background knowledge* about what happens to her when she has the hiccups and then she used the *rereading fix-up strategy* to check (*monitor*) her comprehension.

Ultimately, she is showing the students how to weave together a variety of strategies to make sense of the text—the "read ahead slowly" fix-up strategy gets linked to two of the seven comprehension strategies, "summarization" and "using background knowledge to make connections to bring meaning to the sentence," before she goes back to use the "rereading fix-up strategy" to check her understanding, which is yet another one of the seven comprehension strategies (monitoring comprehension). In this small example we can see how complicated the reading process actually is. When we read successfully we never use just one strategy. Instead, we integrate the entire set of strategies in different combinations.

After the think-aloud, the teacher might turn the conversation back to the students to ask them whether they interpreted the sentence in a different way or used different strategies: "Did anyone understand that sentence in a different way?" "Did anyone use other strategies to help them make sense of that sentence?" By doing this the teacher opens the door to a safe environment where different combinations of strategies can be used and different interpretations of the text are valued. What we see in this example is a teacher who is providing explicit instruction, but she is grounding it in authentic reading experiences and continually turns the context back over to the students.

Another aspect of explicit instruction includes providing lots of guided practice for readers to use and try out ways of recognizing and using strategic behaviors in varied contexts. This guided practice should take place over time and should gradually shift the responsibility for strategic thinking, actions, and behaviors to students so that over time students are able to engage in these processes independently. This is where Dewitz et al. (2009)

found that core reading programs lagged in their attempts at reproducing research-based best practices in comprehension strategy instruction. These programs simply did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to use what they had learned in multiple contexts and under varying conditions. As well, there was too much teacher guidance that did not enable students to assume responsibility for their own learning.

Explicit instruction should also occur in authentic reading contexts. That is, readers need to practice being strategic using authentic texts of all sorts—books, informational texts, comic books, magazines, online texts, newspapers, and so on. Transfer will not occur unless readers have the opportunity to think about how they might be strategic in different contexts (e.g., in school, out of school, in church) and under different circumstances (e.g., when they are fatigued, unmotivated, stressed).

Unlike direct instruction, explicit instruction does not break the reading process down into separate parts or subskills. Each time reading occurs it should reflect the entire reading process with authentic texts. That is, strategic reading requires students to read whole texts—not chunks of texts, or a couple of sentences, or sentences with blanks in them, or words (or parts of words) in isolation. In order for readers to truly understand what it means to be strategic they must encounter the reading process in its complex entirety. It is similar to learning to drive a car. Imagine if we taught teenagers how to drive by having steering practice using fake steering wheels in a classroom. After steering practice, imagine the teacher providing braking practice by having students pumping imaginary brakes, followed by acceleration practice using imaginary accelerator pedals. Inauthentic sites of practice do not provide learners with the realities they will encounter when they have to coordinate all of those separate pieces into a coherent whole while also making decisions about where and when to brake and under what conditions you might need to brake more quickly. So it is with reading and learning to be strategic. We must provide authentic learning contexts in which readers learn to negotiate and manage the entire process all at once. This means being an active participant in the process and learning to make decisions.

Pearson and Dole (1987) have also noted that during explicit instruction there are no "correct" answers. There are multiple sets of strategies, combinations of strategies, and strategic behaviors that can be used to accomplish a given reading task. If we use the driving scenario again, it is similar to using multiple or different routes to arrive at the same place for a meeting. Everyone can arrive at the same place using different paths. So it is with strategic processes in reading. Different readers can use different strategies, combinations of strategies, and strategic behaviors to accomplish the same goal—comprehension of text.

The final feature of explicit instruction is that the feedback that teachers offer should be suggestive rather than corrective. If there are no "correct" answers, then the feedback we offer students should provide alternate sugges-

tions or different ways of approaching the task. We can also provide opportunities for students to share the different strategies they use with each other so they can see how other readers approach the and accomplish tasks.

Agency/Metacognition

Agency refers to the notion that people are active participants in life events, not simply a product of those events (Bandura, 2008). In reading this means that the reader plays an active role in and influences the manner in which the reading event occurs. That is, the reader is an agent who has an influence on how the reading event will proceed and what strategic behaviors and actions will be used. In many classrooms that teach "strategies," however, it is often the teacher who takes on a great deal of authority in terms of making decisions about what strategies will be taught, to whom, with what texts, and when. At times, teachers determine what graphic organizers will be used, with what texts, and when they will be filled out. In a classroom that fosters agency, the teacher enables and empowers students to make such decisions. At the heart of agentic behavior is metacognition. That is, students are able to influence and make decisions about the reading process when they are able to evaluate their progress to determine whether their reading is successful or unsuccessful and make adjustments as needed so that they can reach their goal.

Johnston (2004) suggested ways in which teachers' language can enable agentic behaviors. He noted that teachers foster agency by providing opportunities for students to stop and talk about their thinking. For example, during a read-aloud teachers might stop at points that are particularly thought provoking or that are prime opportunities for predicting and say, "What are you thinking? Share your thoughts with a partner." These stopping points provide an opportunity for children to verbalize their thought processes. This is not simply "sharing." The goal is for students to actually verbalize their thought processes during the reading process. In this way metacognitive awareness is built.

Instructional opportunities that foster verbalization also occur when students are able to figure out something while reading. For example, if a young reader recognizes a word such as *laundry* that they ordinarily would not recognize, the teacher might say, "You figured that out. How did you do that?" As Johnston (2004) has noted, the teacher's question does not have a "correct" answer. Instead, it is an invitation to tell a narrative about how they solved a problem. The story is a process-oriented story in which the student shares the strategy or combination of strategies that he or she used to solve the problem: "Well, I looked at the picture and saw dirty laundry on the floor. Then I noticed a slot in the wall with a word that began with *L* on it. I figured the word must be *laundry*." By verbalizing these thought processes, students see a variety of ways in which they can solve similar problems.

Thus teachers can encourage metacognitive behaviors by asking open-ended questions that encourage students to share their thought processes.

Other examples include, "Why doesn't that make sense to you?" "What did you do to figure that out?" "How did you know that?" Brown's (2008) study showed that TSI teachers tended to ask students to explain their thinking, whereas non-TSI teachers did not. Such questions led the students in the TSI classrooms to clarify and justify their thinking, and they were able to draw on their personal experiences and evidence from the text to do so.

The language that students use to respond to such questions brings awareness to what are typically "covert" or hidden thought processes (Prawat, 1989). The thoughts become objects for others to reflect on and evaluate. Vygotsky (1978) has noted that such "egocentric" speech is the basis for inner speech. When this type of language is in its external and public form it becomes available for everyone to think about. During that thinking, some individuals may think about how that process might be helpful to them: "Oh, I never thought about doing it that way. I'll have to try that." Such reflection then opens the doors for the individual to try it on their own. When learners attempt such behaviors on their own it shows that they are beginning to internalize the process. These attempts, however, also illustrate the need (as mentioned above) for creating a safe space because these initial attempts are just that—initial—and we want students to be willing to take risks to try new ways of thinking and processing text. As students become more metacognitive they are able to recognize when text doesn't make sense, which means they recognize the need for strategic action. Such recognition leads to action, which leads to agency. Students determine whether they need to be strategic, when they need to be strategic, where they need to be strategic, and how to be strategic. Such agentic behavior is necessary to help students transform from passive to active participants in the reading process.

Scaffolding That Leads to Transfer

Decades of research have shown that strategy instruction improves reading comprehension; however, the troublesome aspect is helping readers transfer such instruction to different contexts. Providing sufficient guided practice under varying conditions is critical to transfer. One way to provide such guided practice is by incorporating strategies instruction into every aspect of the classroom, in every content area. This includes creating a safe context and providing opportunities for student verbalization that lead to agency in *every* learning opportunity—during read-alouds, during shared reading, during guided reading, and after independent reading. This form of scaffolding is flexible and might occur during whole-class, small-group, or individualized instruction. TSI is a model of instruction that incorporates these principles into every reading event because the teacher–student and student–student conversations that characterize TSI can occur during the reading of any text, including online reading. The type of teacher scaffolding that occurs during TSI is not preplanned. It requires a trained teacher who is able to identify opportune, teachable moments as students are reading text in authentic con-

texts. Brown (2008) has noted that teachers gradually release responsibility to students by engaging in think-alouds in which they explain and model their own thought processes to students as described above. TSI teachers grab teachable moments during the course of authentic reading experiences to demonstrate the type of strategic thinking and behaviors in which they naturally engage.

At other times, particularly with struggling readers, scaffolding that leads to transfer needs to be planned more deliberately. During this type of scaffolding the teacher might select a strategy, a combination of strategies, or a strategic behavior on which to focus instruction. These preplanned lessons might be conducted during guided reading groups so that students can practice using the focal strategies with texts at their independent or instructional reading level. This type of instruction should not occur with texts that are at a frustration level for students.

Almasi's (2003) strategy instruction model describes a means of planning instructional lessons so that teacher-scaffolded support is gradually reduced. In this model, two dimensions of scaffolded support are considered: (1) the amount of cognitive effort a reader must expend, and (2) the nature of the instructional tasks and texts used during the lesson (see Figure 10.2). The amount of cognitive effort a reader must expend is greater when the reader must complete the reading tasks independently, because all of the burden for reading and enacting strategic behaviors belongs to the reader; however, the amount of cognitive effort diminishes when the reader can complete the reading task with a partner, a small group, or with the whole class. By using various grouping patterns the teacher can provide guided practice and scaffolding in different ways.

The amount of scaffolded support can also be varied by teaching students how to engage in strategic behaviors using different types of tasks and texts in lessons. If we define "text" broadly so that it includes any sign or symbol that communicates a message, then texts would include movies, cartoons, pictures, wordless picture books, texts that are read aloud, texts read during shared reading, and texts read independently. This broad conceptualization of "text" means that initial strategy lessons can introduce readers to difficult strategies such as comprehension monitoring without requiring them actually to decode the text. In this manner, struggling readers can learn very high-level cognitive strategies at a young age. By introducing readers to strategic processing in this manner it helps them learn the language of being a strategic reader.

Focal lessons aimed at teaching students new strategies or strategic behaviors (e.g., making predictions, monitoring comprehension, summarizing, visualizing, making connections, setting purposes) that they did not previously know about might begin with very concrete lessons using video excerpts from movies or television programs. In this type of lesson teachers can provide explicit instruction for students using "texts" in which the reader can focus solely on the strategic processing rather than having to bear the

additional burden of decoding. For example, Mrs. Macklin noticed that her second graders often made "wild" predictions that were based more on their background knowledge and didn't use the text to help form the prediction. She decided to model how to predict by using a video clip from a TV show in which she could stop the video at a highly predictable or "cliff-hanger" point and think aloud about the thoughts going through her mind as she formed a prediction: "Well, I'm really excited to see the next part because I noticed _____ and that makes me think that _____ is going to happen next." At this point she might open the discussion up for the students to share their thoughts: "Does anyone else have a prediction about what might happen next in the show?" As students share their ideas, Mrs. Macklin will try to encourage them to verbally share the thought processes they are using as they form their predictions and link those ideas to some evidence in the show that they have already seen: "Oh, you think _____ is going to happen? What did you notice in the show so far that makes you think that?" Mrs. Macklin would then continue using the think-aloud with whole-class input during this lesson in which the "text" is a TV show. This lesson would be located at point A in Figure 10.2.

After teaching this type of lesson, follow-up guided practice lessons can be planned that vary either the type of text or task (e.g., teaching students how to make predictions with a wordless picture book or during a read-aloud while keeping it as a whole-class or small-group activity so cognitive effort needed will still be low—points B1 and C1 in Figure 10.2) and/or the amount

		Concrete ← → **Abstract**					
		Event/ Experience	Video/TV	Read-Aloud	Wordless Picture Book	Picture Book	Book
Less Individual Cognitive Effort Needed ↑	Whole Class		A	B1	C1		
	Small Group						
	Trio		B2				
More Individual Cognitive Effort Needed ↓	Pair		C2				
	Individual						D

FIGURE 10.2. Scaffolded instructional support for strategic processing. Adapted from Almasi (2003, p. 63). Copyright 2003 by The Guilford Press. Adapted by permission.

of cognitive effort needed (e.g., making predictions from a video with a partner or independently—points B2 and C2 in Figure 10.2). The goal in this form of scaffolding is to alter the types of texts, tasks, and grouping arrangements during follow-up guided practice sessions so that, over time, we are releasing the responsibility for strategic processing to students. Eventually, students will be using the strategy independently with text written at their instructional level (i.e., making it to point D in Figure 10.2). By planfully mapping out these two dimensions of scaffolding during instruction, responsibility is gradually released to students, which leads to transfer.

In summary, the three key ingredients to support an environment that cultivates strategic and reflective learning are: (1) context, (2) agency/metacognition, and (3) scaffolding. These three components are essential within a setting that values the learning process because they provide a space where students' prior experiences, individual perceptions, and own pace of learning are valued. Such an environment includes:

Context

- The teacher creates a safe environment in which students are able to explore, try out, and try on various ways of being, acting, and thinking.
  - The safe environment is a space where readers construct and build their own understanding of themselves and what works for them under what conditions.
  - In a safe environment there are no "correct" answers.
  - A safe environment celebrates "I don't get it" or "I'm confused" responses—these are teachable moments when learners are becoming strategic.
- The teacher includes explicit instruction, in which he or she explains, models, engages in think-alouds, and provides guided practice in authentic contexts.
- Authentic texts should be used.
- Strategy instruction should involve the whole reading process and use whole texts—not just part of it such as reading a sentence, a sentence with blanks in it, or a paragraph.

Agency/Metacognition

- Reader plays an active role in and influences the manner in which the reading event occurs.
- Students determine when they need to be strategic, where they need to be strategic, and how to be strategic as they transform from passive to active participants in the reading process.
- The goal is for students to verbalize their thought processes during the reading process as they become metacognitive.

Scaffolding

- Scaffolding is flexible and might occur during whole-class, small-group, or individual instruction.
- Scaffolding is incorporated into all content areas and in all teacher–student or student–student conversations.
- The goal is to gradually release the responsibility for strategic processing to students so that eventually they are using the strategy independently at their instructional level. We can do this by gradually:
  - Altering the types of texts used for guided practice.
  - Altering the amount of individual cognitive effort needed during the task.

It is within such an environment that we begin to recognize it is not just about the strategy you teach—environment matters. Research has shown that teaching strategies in isolation is not effective; we must provide a space for students that cultivates their transformation into independent, agentic learners who recognize that context matters as they decide when and how to use strategies that best meet their needs.

REFLECTIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

This chapter aimed to change the discourse surrounding comprehension strategy instruction from ideas about how to teach the seven research-based strategies to ideas about how to teach students to be strategic. This focus will hopefully help teachers achieve the most elusive aspect of comprehension instruction: transfer. Transfer happens when students become agentic. They see the value of thinking strategically and use it to make decisions about how to solve problems as they read.

The benefit of this approach to comprehension instruction is that we know it works. The research reviewed in this chapter is quite conclusive that teaching readers to be strategic results in long-term gains in comprehension. There are several limitations to consider, however. One is that learning to teach in this manner is difficult and can take years to learn how to do well (Anderson, 1992; Brown & Coy-Ogan, 1993; Duffy 1993a, 1993b; El-Dinary & Schuder, 1993; Pressley, Schuder, SAIL Teachers, Bergman, & El-Dinary, 1992). Another issue is that most assessments of comprehension focus on the end products of comprehension, which often rely on memory and recall of text and the ability to make inferences. The reliance on literal and inferential questions as the primary means of assessing comprehension means that instruction tends to approximate the text. Assessments that focus more on the processes used to make sense of text would be better aligned with an emphasis on teaching students to be strategic. Currently, we are left to rely on self-reports of strategy use (which are not always reliable) or think-aloud pro-

tocols (which are time consuming to administer and labor intensive to code) as the primary means of assessing strategic processing. Developing new forms of assessing strategic processing (and valuing them) would begin to change the instructional emphasis in our schools and classrooms.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

For decades we have emphasized the importance of teaching students comprehension strategies. However, shifting the emphasis from "the strategy" to "the student" is critical. This shift requires teachers to move from focusing on the strategies that are taught to the context in which they are taught. The focus on context ensures that we create learning opportunities that make it safe for readers to try on new ways of thinking and acting. A safe space accompanied by explicit instruction means that the context is ripe for readers to construct meaning and explore their own identities as readers. When we also include lots of opportunities for students to verbalize and share the thought processes they use while reading, this enables them to become more metacognitively aware while reading. Such metacognitive awareness enables readers to evaluate their reading progress and make decisions about what strategic processes may be needed to successfully attain their goals. When readers are active participants who make their own decisions about the reading process they possess agency, which is the key to transformation.

This chapter suggests that by recognizing the underlying belief systems that are perpetuated by various programs, change can begin to occur in educational environments. If learners are valued within their own comprehension instruction, positive change will be reflected in how these students negotiate/identify themselves as learners. By cultivating an environment that values the learner as inextricably linked to their own learning process, their agency will improve and positively affect their ability to transform into lifelong learners who are strategic and reflective.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Create a safe environment for strategy use.
2. Teach strategies by using explicit instruction.
3. Include opportunities for student verbalization in all instruction by asking open-ended questions that encourage students to share how they process text.
4. Vary the types of texts and tasks used during instruction.

5. Vary the amount of cognitive effort needed by students in order to release responsibility for strategic processing from teacher to student.

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