

# **The Three Cs of Comprehension Instruction**

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# Walter Kintsch's Text Processing Theory

- **A reader building a coherent representation of a text is the core of comprehension.**
- **Good comprehenders move through text focusing on the content at hand and connecting it with information already given and what they already know about a topic. They strive for coherence.**
- **So. . . the goal of comprehension instruction is to support students' construction of a coherent representation of text.**
- **Support needs to focus students on what's being discussed right at the end of their noses, and when possible, to help them connect that to what they already know from previous text and outside text knowledge.**

# The Three Cs of Comprehension Instruction

- **Focus on Content**
- **Make Connections**
- **Strive for high standards of Coherence**

# Comprehension Strategies

**Guide students to become aware of how well they comprehend as they read ... Explicit formal instruction on these strategies is believed to lead to improvement in text understanding (NRP, 2000).**

- ◆ **generate questions to check for understanding**
- ◆ **summarize**
- ◆ **develop a mental image**
- ◆ **create or use graphic organizers**

**When comprehension strategies came onto the scene, Moddy McKeown and I were hesitant because**

- ◆ they did not seem to focus on, or perhaps even deal with, coherence**
- ◆ they might take students' attention away from text content to the strategy**

# Others have Questioned Strategies

**Provides too many options to make decisions about during reading, rather than encouraging understanding (Winograd & Johnston, 1987).**

**If teachers helped students understand the text in front of them, the so-called comprehension strategies “would take care of themselves” (Carver, 1987).**

**Explicit explanations and self-reflections may become more complicated than the task itself (Pearson & Dole, 1987; Pearson & Fielding, 1991).**

**In employing a strategy, students may shift much of their thinking to strategy use, leaving insufficient mental resources to turn their attention to making sense of what they read (Sinatra, Brown, & Reynolds, 2002).**

# Conclusions From 10 Years of Text Studies

- **Few students seemed to construct coherent representations of what they read.**
- **Some students could provide surface information.**
- **Some students simply didn't "get it."**

## ***Boston Tea Party***

**George III, the king of England, said that there had to be a tax on something to prove that the British had the right to tax. So there was still a small tax on tea. The colonists remained firm. They would not pay any tax passed by Parliament. Colonial women refused to buy or serve tea.**

**British merchants were not selling much tea. So Parliament passed a law that greatly lowered its price. Boatloads of tea were sent to America. Since it was cheaper than ever, the British thought that surely the colonists would buy tea now!**

**They were wrong. Tea was burned. Tea was left to rot. Ships loaded with it were not allowed in ports. In Boston the Sons of Liberty dressed up as Indians. Late at night they went to Boston Harbor and threw more than 300 chests of tea into the water. This action was called the Boston Tea Party.**

## **Tina's Recall**

**It's about the Boston Tea Party, and it's about a whole bunch of, like, they were bringing loads over and it was rotten, and all that, so they went back and got more loads and dumped all the tea into the water and stuff like that.**

## *The Nile*

**Each year for thousands of years, the Nile has flooded. When this happened, the farmers had water for their crops. But it happened only once a year. Then dams were built to control the water. As you know, lakes are formed behind dams. Today the Nile does not flood. The water from the lakes is used to water the crops all year.**

## **A Student's Response to *The Nile***

**Teacher: So, what's has the author told us about the Nile?**

**Student 1: The Nile always flooded, once a year for thousands of years. The farmers used the water for their crops. Then they built dams. Now the Nile doesn't flood, and the farmers use the water from the lake for their crops.**

## **Another Student's Response to *The Nile***

**Teacher: So, what has the author told us about the Nile?**

**Student 2: The farmers used to just get water once a year, and it came in a big flood. So they figured if they could take that water and spread it across the whole year, they'd be OK. So then they built a dam and that holds all the water from the flood and saves it for when they need it.**

## *Ralph S. Mouse*

**Ralph thought of the old hotel with its shabby lobby warmed by a crackling fire. He missed the reassuring tick of the rasping old clock. He even missed--sort of--his brothers, sisters, and cousins. He wondered what they would say if he went home with Ryan without his motorcycle. . . . The scoffing of his relatives was something Ralph could not face. Never. (Beverly Cleary, 1982)**

## **Student Recall on *Ralph S. Mouse***

**Teacher: So, what's going on with Ralph now?**

**Student 1: Ralph was thinking about the hotel where he lived. He misses the tick of the clock and he even sort of misses his relatives. He didn't go home with Ryan without his motorcycle.**

**Student 2: Ralph misses his home at the hotel, but he can't go home because he's afraid his relatives will tease him because he lost his motorcycle.**

# **What kinds of problems did we see?**

- ◆ **Lack of adequate decoding**
- ◆ **Lack of adequate fluency**
- ◆ **Lack of vocabulary knowledge**
- ◆ **Lack of engagement**

**Toward encouraging engagement, we developed Questioning the Author.**

**It's an approach that attempts to focus students' attention on text content through directed discussion.**

**Teacher and students work through a text together.**

- Portions of text are read.**
- Open questions are interspersed.**
- Students' responses are followed up and used to create focused discussion.**

# **Examples of interspersed initial questions (Queries)**

- **What's the author trying to say?**
- **What's the author's message?**
- **What's going on here?**
- **What picture is the author giving us?**
- **What do you think the author wants us to know from all this?**
- **What's this all about?**

# Some general comments in the formulation of questions

- Retrieval
- Prediction
- Have you ever...?

Goal is good—relating students' background to the text

But. . . often it has the effect of students leaving the text and focusing on their experiences (Kucan & Beck, 1995)

- What else. . . ?

Doesn't promote connecting ideas. Tends to promote making a list of things that can get further and further from text ideas.

- Questions that do too much of the students' work:

The Tiger's Heart

The Bracelet

## **Back to QtA**

**We have learned from training roughly 2,000 teachers that:**

- They learn fairly quickly to develop open initial questions, and to intersperse them in reasonable places.**
- Using students' responses to those questions to encourage a conversation that connects ideas is hard.**

# Example of not using students' responses to connect ideas

<b>What does Zenny want to do?</b>	<b>He wants to know if the kids want to fly kites.</b>
<b>What did this old man do with the kites to begin with?</b>	<b>Makes them.</b>
<b>What were on the kites, what pictures?</b>	<b>There's a samurai.</b>
<b>What's a samurai?</b>	<b>A warrior.</b>
<b>Now what is on the other kite?.</b>	<b>A butterfly.</b>
<b>What does the girl think, because there are only two kites?</b>	<b>The old man wants to fly one and the little boy. . .</b>
<b>So where does that leave the girl?</b>	<b>Out of it.</b>

# An example of using students' responses to connect ideas and focus discussion

<b>So what picture is the author giving us here?</b>	<b>The old man comes in with these kites he made, and Rinko—I mean Zenny—kind of <u>feels left out</u> because he [the old man] like only has two kites and there are three of them.</b>
<b>But how would that make her <u>feel left out</u>?</b>	<b>Because she <u>is a girl</u> and um the kite maker has only two kites.</b>
<b>But what does being a <u>girl</u> have to do with anything?</b>	<b><u>She</u> is probably thinking one kite is for her brother and the other one is for the old man. <u>She</u> has never flown a kite before.</b>
	<b>Yeah—Zenny never flew a kite before; the old man's kites were made just for the boys.</b>

**Oh, I see. You are saying that she feels left out because she is pretty sure the second kite is for a boy. And what about these kites? What is on them?**

**One has a butterfly on it and the other has a fighter or something.**

**Yes, the one has a butterfly and the other is a samurai—which is a Japanese warrior. What does that tell us?**

**That one is more like a girly kite—and one is more like something a boy would like.**

**I think it tells us that the old man makes the kites and he like made one for the girl—for Zenny—and he made the warrior one for the boy.**

<b>So you are connecting the idea that the old man is the kite maker and maybe he intentionally made one for Zenny and one for Rinko. What does that tell us about the old man?</b>	<b>That he made the kites.</b>
<b>But what does it tell us about the kind of man the old man is?</b>	<b>That he was like kind and thoughtful. He did not want Zenny to feel left out.</b>
	<b>I think it means that the kite maker, the um, old man is kind of like more “with it.” He is making kites for girls now and not just boys. Maybe he has changed.</b>

# **Questioning the Author Discussion Moves**

**Marking**

**Turning-back**

**...to students**

**...to text**

**Revoicing**

**Modeling**

**Annotating**

**Recapping**

## Marking

Drawing attention to an idea that has come up in order to emphasize its importance.

*So it was the British who were sinking the French ships.*

## Turning-back to Students

Turning responsibility back to students for thinking through and figuring out ideas.

*He's in danger. Tell us more. What do you mean by that?*

## Turning-back to Text

Turning students' attention back to the text as a source for clarifying their thinking.

*What did the author say about their relationship?*

## Revoicing

**Interpreting what students are struggling to express and rephrasing the ideas so that they can become part of the discussion. Raising the level of language.**

**Student: Okay, like he thought up pulleys, the telescope, city planning, umm like these things, we still see them. But like, he lived way back then.**

**Teacher: So you're saying that Leonardo invented a lot of things that we still use today and that is very impressive because he lived such a long time ago.**

## Modeling

**Making public some of the processes in which readers engage in the course of reading.**

### Modeling affective responses to text

**"A fearful man, all in coarse gray, with a great iron on his leg...A man...smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flint...who limped and shivered and glared and growled."**

## Modeling how a reader might work through confusing portions of text

***The coyote can't really eat rocks and sand, so might be a little confusing. I guess the author is talking about how food can be hard to find for the coyote; it seems like all he has around him is rocks and sand--which of course he can't eat.***

## Annotating

Providing information to fill in gaps in the text.

*"The author doesn't really explain why everyone was nervous about the house guest, but . . ."*

*"The author doesn't talk about the differences between the Articles of Confederation and the new Constitution, so let's think about that. . ."*

## Recapping

Highlight the major ideas discussed in a given portion.

- **Strategy approaches are better than traditional instruction**
- **Discussion is better than traditional instruction (IRE)**
- **Content Approach (QtA) is better than traditional instruction**
- **Could it be that anything is better than traditional instruction?**
- **But are some of the nontraditional approaches better than others?**

# Head to head comparisons

- **QtA vs Great Books**
- **On-going: Cognitive Strategies or Cognitive Engagement (Steve Stahl, David Pearson, et al.)**
- **Just initiated: Comparison of Strategies and Content approaches. (M. McKeown & I. Beck, Co PIs; T. Shanahan, Investigator)**

**We will develop standardized lessons on common texts for a strategies approach and a content approach.**

# Why standardized instruction?

- **There are a variety of instantiations of strategies approaches and limited information about procedures included in research reports.**
- **QtA is quite specified, but even with excellent training, the most important of which are in-class observations and feedback---the teacher variable is very significant.**

# How Standardize

- **Will stop at the same places on common texts.**
- **Will virtually script what the teacher says at each stop.**
- **Will send the strategies-based materials to experts in strategies instruction for review to assure that they represent high quality instantiations of the strategy approach.**

## **Example of how a strategies approach and a content approach might play themselves out**

**Students have just finished reading a short segment of text.**

**In a strategies approach, the teacher might ask the students to summarize the text and would ask them to recall what kind of information goes into a good summary. She might follow up a student's summary by asking other students if it was a good summary and why or why not.**

**In a content approach, the teacher might ask what the portion of text had been about, and as students respond, might follow up by asking how contributed pieces of information fit in with what is being read or why the information is important.**

## **Most researchers would agree:**

- **Students and teacher should work through a text together, at least some times.**
- **Most of the teacher's questions should be open questions that are not satisfied by simply retrieving information.**
- **Prompts should be provided that induce students to work through the ideas in a text.**
- **Make the kids do the work of thinking so that understanding is built and learning takes place.**