

EFFECTIVE COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

Developing Comprehension in Upper Elementary Students:
Effective Comprehension Strategies

by

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled *Developing Comprehension in Upper Elementary Students, Effective Comprehension Strategies* by Amber M. Britt, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Literacy Education: Birth - Grade 6, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.


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Abstract

The purpose of this Master's Thesis, which resulted in a Professional Development Project, was to explore effective comprehension strategies and their effectiveness on improving students' understanding. The comprehension strategies that were explored in the project included rereading, generating questions, reciprocal teaching, and paraphrasing. The project also explored the literary approaches sustained silent reading (SSR) and scaffold silent reading (ScSR). The professional development project contained a one day workshop on effective comprehension strategies. With the goal of having teachers who participated being able to implement the strategies with their students creating critical readers and thinkers.

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Chapter 1

Comprehension is a vital tool in learning, especially in reading. Without understanding what is read, a child will not obtain the main goal of reading, which is comprehension. While teaching in a graduate Reading Clinic, I taught a fifth-grade student who struggled with her comprehension skills and retelling ability. Her mother indicated concerns about her reading comprehension. I used what I learned in previous classes about effective strategies, and what I found on my own, to help her build her use of comprehension strategies. Strategies that worked well with the student were rereading, questioning, and vocabulary instruction. During our weekly lessons, I also wanted to have the student enhance her verbal retellings and summaries of what she read. Over all, we worked a lot on improving her ability to use metacognitive strategies that would allow her to be a more independent critical thinker and reader.

According to the National Reading Panel (2000), or NPR, "Reading comprehension is very important to the development of children's reading skills and therefore to their ability to obtain an education" (www.nationalreadingpanel.org ¶ 16). Effective comprehension strategies are necessary to develop these reading skills in children to allow them to become critical thinkers and increase their comprehension. In addition, Scanlon, Anderson, and Sweeney (2010) stated that during effective strategy instruction, "The child will develop foundational knowledge and comprehension skills and strategies that will enhance his or her ability to construct the meaning of, and learn from, texts heard or read" (p. 19).

The focus of this Master's Project was to find out the personal metacognitive comprehension strategies that are effective when working with upper elementary students and how they address prereading, during, and post reading instruction. In addition to student metacognitive strategies, I also explored instructional practices teachers use during the day to

promote comprehension, such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) or Scaffold Silent Reading (ScSR) and inquiry based learning. According to the NRP, when students are able to use comprehension methods successfully, they perform better in recall, answering questions, generating questions, and summarizing texts (Williams, 2011).

Strategies I consider to be effective are those that occur when students make positive gains in their overall comprehension. When students become critical and active thinkers, they take control of their own learning and show an increase in their retellings, answering or generating questions, and summarizing, all which indicate that an effective strategy was positively used.

Students often have a hard time with reading comprehension; concerns from classroom teachers confirm this difficulty. “Renewed concerns have recently been expressed about our schools’ ability to teach students how to read. Unfortunately, such concerns are not unfounded, as research indicates that at least 20% of students have significant difficulties with reading acquisition” (Therrien & Hughes, 2008, p. 3).

Many teachers wonder about ways to effectively teach comprehension strategies to students of all ability levels in their classroom. In 2000, the report of the National Reading Panel identified five essential areas of reading instruction (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) that included both lower- and higher- order skills. The NPR obviously recognized the importance of comprehension. “Research indicates that comprehension failures are often associated with difficulties in the lower- order skill of reading fluency and/or the higher- order skill of text comprehension strategy usage” (Therrien, Wickstrom, & Jones, 2006, p. 233). There are many effective comprehension strategies that teachers can implement that will address reading comprehension problems and will enable students to use metacognitive

strategies that lead to critical thinking. The strategies can demonstrate effectiveness by the students showing growth in recall, answering questions, generating questions and summarizing texts.

Background

While working as a substitute teacher in local area school districts, I noticed that teachers use different strategies to help students comprehend what is being read. I wondered about the effectiveness of those strategies. What are the best ways to use these strategies and to make sure they are being taught effectively so that they improve students' overall reading comprehension? I was curious as to why teachers used these strategies and how the strategies worked. I also wanted to know if these strategies help students become critical readers and thinkers. It is important for all educators to know what are effective strategies to use for helping struggling readers in upper elementary levels have a better understanding and comprehension of a text.

This Master's Thesis Project will lead to engaging teachers in learning about effective strategies to use with their upper elementary students who struggle with reading comprehension. I would like to help other professionals, along with myself, develop a better understanding of effective comprehension strategies to use with upper elementary students. The results of this Master's Project will lead to research-based suggestions for effective reading comprehension strategies that will successfully enhance students' critical thinking and responses. Fellow educators and literacy specialists will attend a professional development workshop on using effective comprehension strategies with upper elementary students that will engage the students to become critical thinkers.

Terminology that was critical for this Master's Project includes the following key terms. *Reading Comprehension* is understanding a text that is read, or the process of "constructing meaning" from a text. Comprehension is a "construction process" because it involves all of the elements of the reading process working together as a text is read to create a representation of the text in the reader's mind (Dictionary.com, 2010). *Critical Literacy* is an instructional approach, stemming from Marxist Critical pedagogy, which advocates the adoption of "critical" perspectives toward text. Critical literacy encourages readers to actively analyze texts and offers strategies for what proponents describe as uncovering underlying messages.

Theoretical Stance

The Constructivist theory guided this Master's Project. Constructivism is a theory of learning that emphasizes the active construction of knowledge by individuals. Learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it. When teachers teach, they are learning along with their students, therefore learning is not just for the students. "Constructivism has been applied directly to the study of reading as an explanation of the way in which reader's process" (Anderson & Pearson, 1984, cited in Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 48).

John Dewey was one of the first American constructivists. He emphasized the growth of the individual, the importance of the environment, and the role of the teacher in student's learning (Tracy & Morrow, 2006). The approach to education became known as inquiry learning, which was coined by John Dewey. He believed that through inquiry learning, students actively create their own learning. When a student questions what is read, he or she develops a better chance of being able to comprehend.

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) argued that every reading experience is unique to each individual. From the cornerstone of Rosenblatt's Transactional/Reader Response Theory, the notion that all readers have individualized interpretations is true, because each reader has unique background schemas. The theory and the problem stated in Rosenblatt's research can relate to how educators have to consider the reader's response as well as schema theory. Rosenblatt further extended the application of Schema Theory in the field of reading. "Based on the idea that every individual is unique with regard to what constitutes his or her schema in and particular area, Rosenblatt argues that every reading experience is therefore unique to each individual as well" (Tracy & Morrow, 2006, p.55). Rosenblatt's work articulates two kinds of responses that all readers have to texts: Efferent responses and aesthetic responses. These types of responses can be beneficial to a teacher to use when trying to understand student responses to literature. Students would be able to have more opportunities to answer higher level thinking questions and gradually be encouraged to take on more independent level reading.

According to Tracey and Morrow (2006), one of Vygotsky's most prominent works is the belief that children learn as a result of social interactions with others (p.108). Social Constructivism is another social learning theory that is relevant to this Master's Project. Rosenblatt's, Dewey's, and Vygotsky's ideas guided the research in this Master's Project. The three theorists' ideas all promoted critical thinking and social interactions which were evident in many effective comprehension strategies. Students' social interactions are very important when expression their understanding and comprehension. When students can verbally retell about what they read, it shows understanding and overall comprehension. The students will become critical thinkers when they have the ability to reflect on what was read, verbally retell or express

to others what happened, generate questions, use rereading, and paraphrasing, to enhance their comprehension skills.

It is important for all educators to know effective comprehension strategies to use with students in upper elementary grades. In so doing, the teacher will enable students to become critical, engaged, thinkers. Teachers realize that there are many strategies to use, but which ones work best and, overall, increase students' test scores? More importantly, which ones enable students to become lifelong, critical thinkers? This Master's Project will include a literature review of effective comprehension strategies that focus on higher order thinking and will also include a chapter on professional development that will provide a framework for teachers about effectively teaching comprehension strategies.

The purpose of this Master's Project is to provide examples of effective comprehension strategies, via a literature review and a professional development project, that will lead students to become overall critical thinkers and readers. Therefore, the research questions that guide this Master's Project include the following:

- What are effective comprehension strategies for upper elementary students?
- Which strategies also promote higher order thinking?
- Which literacy approaches promote overall comprehension?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into two major categories: Effective comprehension strategies as well as literacy approaches that teachers can use to enhance comprehension in upper elementary students.

Effective Comprehension Strategies

Duke and Pearson (2009) reviewed the importance of effective reading comprehension practices. The authors described several effective individual and collective strategies for teaching comprehension, along with describing the characteristics of a balanced comprehension program into which the strategies are embedded. The authors, Duke and Pearson (2009), listed reciprocal teaching, questioning, student think alouds, and predictions as effective comprehension routines or strategies. The authors supported the use of any aforementioned strategies as “improving student’s comprehension of text” (p. 118). Good readers, according to Duke and Pearson (2009), are active readers who look over the structure of the text and predict what will come. The comments they provide is the foundation for the follow subsections.

Rereading. According to Hendin and Conderman (2010), the purpose of reading is to describe some specific features of informational text that striving readers often find challenging and suggest ways teachers can model and guide rereading to foster students’ comprehension. The experimental study, conducted by Hendin and Conderman, included four students in sixth grade. The findings prove that rereading represents one of many skills spontaneously used by good readers. The authors also pointed out that “readers need multiple exposures with a variety of texts to become efficient implementers” (p. 563-564). If students have several opportunities

to read and reread a text, they will become more familiar with it, be better able to comprehend the material, and altogether become a more critical thinker.

Therrien and Hughes (2008) explained the comparison of repeated readings and question generating effects on students' fluency and comprehension in an experimental study that was conducted on 32 fourth through sixth grade students. Findings revealed that the impact of repeated reading on comprehension was also likely mediated by how comprehension is measured. According to the article, if students are exposed to repeated readings they are likely to do well on comprehension measures that target literal knowledge. However, repeated reading does not directly target inferential knowledge; therefore, it is unlikely to have a dramatic effect on inferential comprehension. The conclusion of the article stated that the effectiveness of repeated reading appears to be maximized when fluency is a concern for the targeted students and when literal comprehension is emphasized.

Therrien, Wickstrom, and Jones (2006) conducted research to ascertain if a combined repeated reading and question generation intervention was effective as improving the reading achievement of fourth through eighth grade students who are at risk for reading failure. Thirty students were selected for the experimental study, which did involve a control group. According to the authors of the research, repeated reading consistently improved students' reading fluency on reread passages. However, these gains did not always translate to new readings nor did they consistently result in improvements in comprehension. One of the results indicated that intervention has the potential to improve students' overall reading achievement.

Millis and King (2001) examined the extent to which readers strategically comprehend expository texts after prior reading and test taking. In the experimental study, 38 students participated in experiment one and 46 students participated in experiment two. Sentence reading

times and the memory for expository texts were examined across two readings. The authors concluded from their experimental study that during a second reading, readers sped up on information that they had earlier encoded. The results expressed that recall also significantly increased through rereading.

Laverpool (2008) conducted a study of rereading and its effect of reading comprehension monitoring. The experimental study, which had a total of 187 participants, was used to “ascertain whether or not there was significant differences in comprehension scores, rereading fluencies, and rereading rates of speed” (2008, p. 31). The findings of this data supported the conclusion that there is no appreciable difference in the way either group of students uses rereading. Using rereading as a metacognitive strategy to monitor and adjust reading comprehension may benefit some students but in this study it was not beneficial for most in the study.

McDaniel, Howard, and Einstein (2009) demonstrated the effective use of rereading, in a strategy called 3R, or Read-Recite-Review, in their experimental study involving 72 students. The authors determined how important rereading and note taking is for effective results in students understanding (comprehension). The results of the study proved that the 3R strategy capitalizes on the benefits of testing and feedback. “The experiment revealed advantages of this strategy, relative to both rereading and note taking, for free recall” (McDaniel, Howard, and Einstein, 2009, p. 521).

Reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching is a contemporary application of Vygotsky's theories; it is used to improve students' ability to learn from text. In this method, teachers and students collaborate in learning and practicing four key skills: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting (Palincsar, 1986). The teacher's role in the process is reduced over

time. Also, reciprocal teaching is relevant to instructional concepts such as "scaffolding" and "apprenticeship", in which a teacher, or a more advanced peer, helps to structure or arrange a task so that a novice can work on it successfully. Palincsar (1986) described the concept of reciprocal teaching: "Reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional activity that takes place in the form of a dialogue between teachers and students regarding segments of text." Palincsar and Brown (1984) have conducted a series of studies to determine the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching.

The two studies conducted by Palincsar and Brown (1984) indicated the importance of reciprocal teaching and the effects it has on a student's reading comprehension. In summary, these four activities used in the studies were selected because they provide a dual function, that of enhancing comprehension, and at the same time affording an opportunity for the student to check whether it is occurring. Thirty-seven seventh-grade students took part in the first study. Twenty-four of the students had reading problems; 13 did not. In the second study, there were four teachers involved in the study along with their groups of students, which included a mixture of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. "The success of the reciprocal teaching intervention could be attributed to the particular strategies trained, to the reciprocal teaching procedure, or to a combination of both" (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, p.168). The results of the study concluded clear qualitative evidence of improvement in the students' dialogues, the quantitative improvement on the comprehension tests, and sizable improvements in standardized comprehension scores were recorded in participants in group one.

Reciprocal teaching uses four strategies; all four of the strategies help students become critical thinkers and promote students' comprehension. It is used to increase comprehension. According to several researchers, "when a teacher actively uses reciprocal teaching in most

readings required of students, reading levels increase one to two grade levels in three to six months” (Oczkus, 2005; Sporer, Brunstein, & Kieschke, 2009, p. 624, cited in Stricklin, 2011). Using reciprocal teaching can enable students to become critical thinkers, by having them be in charge of what is being asked and in control of their own learning.

Williams (2010) explained how using reciprocal teaching and how students can become critical thinkers through this teaching process. Through the process of using reciprocal teaching, predicting, questioning, clarification, and summarizing, students gained experience in formulating questions about texts and asking their own questions that came up during reading. Williams also stated that, when students use “heavyweight questions [they] moved towards higher levels of critical thinking” (p. 278).

According to Oddo, Barnett, Hawkins, and Musti-Rao (2010), reciprocal peer tutoring and repeated readings are proven effective teaching strategies. The authors conducted a research on the efficacy of peer-mediated repeated readings and the impact of repeated readings (RR) on oral reading fluency and comprehension. The results of the experimental study, which was conducted on group of 17 fourth graders, concluded that “RR using a teacher-implemented approach was effective in improving reading performance” (p. 857). The authors of the study also concluded that it may be beneficial for teachers to supplement RR strategies with other fluency methods and comprehension strategies. Overall, this will make students more critical thinkers, while using as many effective strategies as possible to help them gain comprehension.

Question generation. Weinstein, McDermott, and Roediger (2010) conducted three experimental studies with a total of 86 students. The studies compared reading with three different strategies: rereading, answering questions, and generating questions, all of which were designed to help enhance memory. The results were based on predictions, performance, and

time. Predictions results were based on how much information the participants could predict after completing a task such as rereading, or answering and generating questions. Performance was measured on correctly answered questions on a final test. Time was also noted on how long students took on reading the passage and on the three tasks: rereading, answering questions, and generating questions. All the results from the study were significant. “Predictions made in the reread and answer questions conditions did not differ” (p. 311).

According to Davey and McBride (1986), research and instruction in self-questioning was focused on the efficacy of having students generate higher order comprehension questions during and after reading. With students focusing on questioning, they are more focused on what they are reading, setting a purpose, and improving their overall comprehension. The experimental study assessed the effects of post-passage question generation on comprehension questioning performance for elementary school students. The research included 50 sixth grade students who had to read and reread four expository passages, or generate two good “think” type questions for each passage read prior to a comprehension test. The results determined that the question generating group exceeded the other group on higher order inferential comprehension test items.

Paraphrasing. Kletzien (2009) suggested that paraphrasing was an effective comprehension strategy. Three students were involved in a case study to demonstrate how to effectively use paraphrasing with students in upper elementary grade levels. Paraphrasing is not the same as summarizing, and often it is more beneficial for students to show comprehension. It is different from retellings as well, since the student is using their own words and not the authors. Paraphrasing encourages the reader to make connections with prior knowledge to access what is already known about the topic, and to use words that are part of the reader’s knowledge. It helps

the reader establish “retrieval cues that enable integration of what is previously known with what is being read, and an important part of comprehension according to Kintsch (1998)” (cited in Kletzein, 2009, p. 73).

Hagaman and Reid (2008) conducted an experimental, single-subject study design, study, using three sixth grade students, which focused the use of a self-regulated strategy development paired with the “RAP” paraphrasing strategy as a way to increase the students’ reading comprehension. The “RAP” paraphrasing strategy is designed to help the student understand the specific events and main ideas of what they read. The steps include Reading a selected text, Asking yourself questions about main ideas, and then Putting the main ideas and details in your own words. According to the authors of the study, the results indicated that use of the RAP paraphrasing strategy increased reading comprehension.

Independent Reading/ Approaches: ScSR and SSR

Garan and DeVogd (2008) used scientific research to show the benefits of sustained silent reading (SSR). The authors offered suggestions on variations to pure sustained silent reading and how teachers can use them in their classrooms. Data analysis showed that more time spent on reading had a significant effect on achievement compared to a control condition where less time was allocated for independent reading; results found that third grade students showed greater gains in comprehension than those in fifth grade (2008). The benefits of SSR are not immediate, according to Garan and DeVogd, but evolve over time. Therefore, the authors suggest that experimental studies regarding SSR are not always practical or even ethical, and may further deter future researchers from implementing SSR.

Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2006) discussed the significance of sustained silent reading and how it transforms readers while using R5 (read, relax, reflect, respond, and rap). To explore the significance of SSR, they used the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) designed for fourth through eighth graders. The authors stated that there is a cause for concern with the disengaged readers in any classroom and that students need access to appealing reading material. An emphasis was also placed on interesting text as well as time to silently read books of student choice to attain higher levels of literacy achievement, was a topic of discussion. The research showed that with R5, positive gains in student achievement were achieved. Using different forms of silent reading can be beneficial for all students.

Poh-Chua and Wai-Ling (2010) focused their research on the association between students' value of reading and their behavior during SSR. The study, which contained 362 seventh grade students, aimed to find out the factors that contributed to the success of SSR. The results showed that "89% of students in the HVR (high value reading) group reported that they were self-motivated to read leisure books during SSR, whereas only 71% of the students on the LVR (low value reading) group reported motivation" (Poh-Chua & Wai-Ling, 2010, p. 173). Students who are more motivated to read during SSR had a better overall understanding of what was read, building comprehension. Poh-Chua (2008) reported the findings of another experimental study that included 244 seventh grade students. The results of that study showed that the program had a significant effect on cultivating students' reading habits and in students' pleasure and enjoyment of reading. If students enjoy reading, their overall reading comprehension will increase as well as their reading fluency.

Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, and Smith (2008) reported on the importance for practicing rereading, which decreased errors and increased students' reading rates and comprehension. The

third grade teachers and school involved in the study believed that students need daily reading practice to become successful, motivated readers. The study involved four classrooms, four third-grade teachers, and a total of 72 students. The teachers concluded that oral reading works, by using scaffold silent reading (ScSR). “ScSR is intended to provide students with the necessary support and guidance, so they can transfer their successful oral reading skills to successful and effective silent reading practice” (Reutzel, Jones, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p. 194). The qualitative findings indicated “that any single reading practice approach used exclusively over long periods of time tends toward tedium for both teachers and students” (p.205). Teachers will find what program works best with their group of students by using different readings programs that overall build students’ reading comprehension.

In another research study by Reutzel, Fawson, and Smith (2008), the main focus is the effectiveness of SSR. “The purpose of the study was to design, implement, and evaluate the efficacy of ScSR compared with the evidence-based best practice of guided repeated oral reading with feedback on 3rd-grade students’ fluency and comprehension growth” (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p. 37). The study took a year and was based on the students’ increase in words read correctly per minute, increase in expression rating scores, and increase in reading comprehension. The author’s definition of fluency involves accuracy, rate, and expression. The results of the study would show if ScSR is an effective comprehension strategy to use with students. According to the study, the students went from an average of 72 WCPM to 100 WCPM by the end of the school year. “According to the national norms, the average fluency WCPM gain from end of second grade to end of third grade is 18 WCPM” (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p. 47). Furthermore, the results of the study concluded that the students increased the correct words read per minute during the school year,

demonstrating an increase in fluency. The study group also had a significant increase in reading comprehension by increasing the number of ideas recalled. “A comparison of the average proportion of the number of ideas unit recalled per WCPM at pretest (.0575) to the average proportion of the number of idea units recalled per WCPM at posttest (.0825) by these students revealed a 43% average increase” (Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2008, p. 48). The increase shown was substantial; showing the reading comprehension growth of the students over a school year was improved.

Conclusion

There are several instructional strategies that are effective when teaching students comprehension skills. Rereading, reciprocal teaching, paraphrasing, and using effective literacy approaches help provide students with strategies to help them become critical thinkers and writers, while increasing their overall comprehension skills. It is a teachers' role and responsibility to effectively demonstrate the correct way(s) to use these strategies for their students. According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), comprehension instruction is not about teaching strategies for strategies' sake, but about teaching students to use strategies purposefully to read any text for any reason, and to walk away from their reading experience with new understanding that may generate even more learning. When students are given many opportunities to use comprehension strategies on their own, they will have the opportunity to become independent learners, overall helping them become critical thinkers and readers.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This Master's Thesis Project culminated in a professional development project and workshop. The process used to find answers to the research questions included the following SUNY Fredonia Library search engines: Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and Education Research Complete. The keywords used in the search engines included: "comprehension", "fluency", "rereading", "vocabulary", "strategies", "Common Core State Standards", "critical thinking", "problem solving", "strategy instruction", "reciprocal teaching", "rereading", "questioning", and "comprehension strategies". The keywords included terms found in the articles and the individual article literature reviews. Helpful teacher resources, such as *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement* by Harvey and Goudvis and *Critical literacy: Enhancing students' comprehension of text* by McLaughlin and DeVogd, were also used.

Data Collection

The articles involved in this Master's Thesis Project had to meet one of the following criteria to be included in the research. The article had to (1) demonstrate a literacy strategy or approach that positively affected student's literacy or comprehension growth, (2) promote higher order of thinking, and/or (3) demonstrate effective comprehension strategies or approaches by showing the students increased in verbal recalls or retellings, answering questions, generating questions, or summarizing texts.

The ways in which the articles in this professional development were selected were determined by several factors. Peer-reviewed articles were selected that contained qualitative or quantitative research. Also, the research questions were kept in mind when selecting articles.

Therefore, I considered the effectiveness of the strategy; whether or not it promoted higher order thinking; and how it promoted overall comprehension in terms of pre, during, and post reading instruction. I also considered the age or grade of the students who were identified as the participants and whether or not they were upper elementary students.

Data Analysis

Once the articles met the above standards, they were coded and divided into sections according to a type of comprehension strategy. They were divided into sections of effective comprehension strategies, paraphrasing, reciprocal teaching, retellings, and question generating, or they were divided among the independent reading approaches/frameworks, ScSR, and SSR. Information was further divided via the use of detailed notes on index cards that indicated the type of study, the participants, and the research findings. The information was categorized according to themes and trends. This data led to the creation of the professional development project.

Chapter 4

Teachers are adults, and adults learn differently than young students. For this professional development involving teachers, the teachers are actually the ones who will sit and learn something, and learn something new. Professional development workshops are where the teachers become the students. How do adults learn? How will this professional development work? What is appropriate when teaching teachers? The teachers are the participants, and with the conclusion of the professional development, they will hopefully gain a new understanding of effective comprehension strategies to use in their classrooms.

In a study involving 1,027 teachers, Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) provided the first large-scale empirical comparison on effects of different characteristics of professional development on teachers' learning. Garet et al. described the effectiveness of using reform types of activities, compared to the traditional workshop type professional developments. These types of activities included study groups, mentoring, or coaching. "In addition, reform types of activities may be more responsive to how teachers learn (Ball, 1996), and may have more influence on changing teaching practice" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 921). The authors also discussed the importance of the teaching material used in the professional development, as well as the participants involved.

The model included three structural features: (a) the form of the activity (reform or traditional), (b) the duration of the activity, and (c) the degree to which the activity emphasizes the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level (Garet et al., 2001). Results indicated that sustained and intensive professional development was more likely to have an impact, as reported by teachers, than shorter professional

development. “The results also indicate that professional development that focuses on academic subject matter (content), gives teachers opportunities for “hands-on” work (active learning), and is integrated into the daily life of the school (coherence), is more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 936). Using a professional development that contains a mixture of traditional and reform types, and making sure the professional development lasts for the appropriate duration seems to be the most beneficial for both the teacher and students.

According to Bean and Morewood (2007), teacher quality is very important when it comes to improving student achievement in reading. Using professional development is a way to monitor and improve the teacher quality when it comes to teaching students new strategies. Bean and Morewood discuss issues and concerns about professional development, evidence-based best practices, best practices in action, and reflections and future directions. As defined in Bean and Morewood’s article, professional development includes “those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skill, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve learning of students” (Guskey, 2002, cited in Bean & Morewood, 2007, p. 375). The focus on student learning is the most important aspect. Therefore, the practices used need to be evidence based. Such practices are research based with positive and effective results.

In a document published by the American Educational Research Association (2005), four points were made about critical elements to include in professional development efforts; they are: (1) professional development should focus on the subject matter teachers will be teaching, (2) teachers learning opportunities should be aligned with real work experiences, (3) adequate time for professional development should be provided, and (4) school districts should have

reliable systems for evaluating the impact of professional development on teachers' practices and student learning.

Bean and Morewood (2007) also deliberate about other ways of improving professional development, such as teacher study groups. In such groups, teachers remain in charge of their own independent learning, but seek to reach personal goals through interaction with others. These groups will be beneficial in discussing new ideas and topics, to explain what worked and what didn't work, and to allow teachers to reflect and problem solve. The authors also indicated that technology is becoming more popular with presentations. Blogging, as well as online courses, are two newer ways to improve and continue the professional development after the presentation is over. There is still much to learn about professional development, it is essential in school improvement plans and will continue to be a popular research effort in years to come.

Professional Development Framework

The key points that were used in this professional development were obtained from Bean and Morewood (2007), Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001), and The American Educational Research Association (2005). The main points presented by the authors are displayed in Table 4.1 on the next page. The authors stated in the above section show the importance of the components selected and used in a professional development workshop. Based on the article by Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon, the authors explained how using reform types of activities, such as study groups and coaching, can show positive results with students. Using traditional types of activities can as be used, such as using a PowerPoint or informational handouts/ pamphlets.

Table 4.1

Author	Key Points	Professional Development
<p>Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001).</p> <p>What makes professional development effective?</p>	<p>In the authors' model there are three structural features involved: (a) the form of the activity (reform or traditional), (b) the duration of the activity, and (c) the degree to which the activity emphasizes the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level.</p>	<p>The activities selected were a mixture of both reform and traditional, such as teacher study groups and PowerPoint presentation. The duration of the professional development can last the entire school year, the workshop is one day, but the teachers will meet monthly with their study groups to discuss progress. The study groups will be assigned based on grade level, so this was teachers can collaborate and discuss teaching ideas with each other.</p>
<p>The American Educational Research Association (2005)</p>	<p>The AERA listed four points that were critical elements to include in professional development efforts; they are: (1) professional development should focus on the subject matter teachers will be teaching, (2) teachers learning opportunities should be aligned with real work experiences, (3) adequate time for professional development should be provided, and (4) school districts should have reliable systems for evaluating the impact of professional development on teachers' practices and student learning.</p>	<p>The subject of the professional development is effective comprehension strategies, all elementary teachers and literacy teachers/specialist can attend the professional development. The teachers attending the professional development will be relevant to their work. Once again the professional development contains a one day workshop, but the teachers will continue to meet once that is complete to discuss the topic. The system used to evaluate the impact of the professional development was not discussed.</p>
<p>Bean, R. M., & Morewood, A. (2007).</p> <p>Best practices in professional development for improving literacy instruction.</p>	<p>The authors listed several key points to include in a professional development, such as creating teacher study groups, keep the focus on student learning, monitor and improve teacher quality.</p>	<p>The professional development created for this Master's Project indicated that teacher study groups would be formed for teachers to meet and discuss the topic of comprehension strategies once the one day workshop is complete. The focus of student learning is relevant as to the evidence based best practices that were selected to be used in the workshop. The professional development will be used to monitor and improve teacher quality, which will overall help students achieve a better understanding and develop better comprehension.</p>

The authors stated in the above section show the importance of the components selected and used in a professional development workshop. Based on the article by Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon, the authors explained how using reform types of activities, such as study groups and coaching, can show positive results with students. Using traditional types of activities can as be used, such as using a PowerPoint or informational handouts/ pamphlets.

Using professional development that contains a mixture of traditional and reform types and making sure the professional development last for the appropriate duration is the most beneficial for both the teacher and students. This professional development project is well grounded in the suggestions set forth by the AERA (2005).

The PowerPoint shown during the presentation contained effective comprehension strategies to be used with upper elementary students to enhance their general comprehension. The strategies included the following: rereading, reciprocal teaching, generating questions, and paraphrasing. Literacy approaches promoting comprehension development were also included, such as ScSR and SSR. Hands on activities were demonstrated as well to effectively show how to use these strategies with the students. Teachers left this professional development workshop with many resources, strategies, and ideas to take back with them to share with colleagues. The strategies will work with upper elementary students, but can also be adapted for lower elementary or high school students as well. Literacy Coaches attending the professional development would be able to share with their colleagues and adapt what they learned into their own schools and districts.

A Literacy Coach is very important in professional development during and after the workshop. The Literacy Coach has several different jobs to do on a daily basis which has them

working with teachers in and out of the classroom. According to Hanson (2011), coaches work with teachers one-on-one, in small groups, and in large groups. The literacy coach may use a “gradual-release” approach in which they introduce a new practice, demonstrates a lesson, co-teach with the teacher, observe the teacher, and see the practice sustained in the classroom. “Coaching gives teachers an opportunity to work alongside another educator to plan, teach, and reflect on instructional processes” (Hanson, 2011, p. 79).

The role of a literacy coach gives them the opportunity to teach other teachers on how to conduct a new lesson. By doing so, this helps the teachers construct meaning and use questions in learning. This professional development project gives teachers researched based effective comprehension strategies to use with their upper elementary students. The presentation will demonstrate effective ways to teach these comprehension strategies, how and when to use them with students, as well as showing evidence of how these effective comprehension strategies will impact students.

The framework for the workshop consists of a one day workshop, where teachers and other educators are invited to join in with the professional development seminar. Once the workshop is completed, the teachers will meet monthly for meetings and focus group discussions. The teacher participants will also be asked to enroll in a blog/discussion forum where they can communicate with other teachers, along with logging daily journal entries. For a detailed sequence of events, see Appendix A.

The professional development workshop consisted of the following activities:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Hands on activities, pamphlets

- Examples of student work in research to help show educators effective comprehension strategies to use while teaching students in their classroom.
- Focus groups: explaining what worked and what didn't work. Meet monthly.
- Additional workshops with teachers of similar grade levels will meet monthly and collaborating on what worked and what didn't work since the last meeting. Teachers can share ideas and give examples.
- Create blog to keep in touch or monitor progress between regular monthly meetings.

See Appendix B for a chart with descriptions of the selected professional development workshop activities.

PowerPoint. The PowerPoint will begin the professional development with an outline of the day's events, which begins with a brief discussion of what the word 'effective' means. The comprehension strategies that are the focus of the professional development will then be addressed: rereading, question generating, reciprocal teaching, and paraphrasing, along with the literacy approaches, ScSR and SSR. The PowerPoint will also explain the next events to follow such as explanations of handouts, examples of student work, assigning focus groups, discussing monthly meetings and additional workshops, and creating and participating in blogs.

Hands on activities and pamphlets. The hands on material will contain pamphlets that are a resource for educators to use as needed and will contain details on each strategy. The pamphlet for rereading will show steps and procedures to use with students on how to effectively teach rereading. The handout for question generating will show effective ways to have students create questions for reading comprehension; there will be a list of questions available for pre, during, and post reading questions. The pamphlet for reciprocal teaching will explain how to use

this strategy in the classroom as this strategy encourages the students to think about their own thought process. The paraphrasing brochure will explain how to use the strategy with upper elementary students to help them effectively develop their overall comprehension. There will also be handouts and pamphlets for the literacy approaches ScSR and SSR. The handouts will explain how these literacy approaches work and how to use them with your students.

Examples of student work. Examples of student work will be passed around to help show educators comprehension strategies. There will be examples of how to effectively use each strategy and literacy approach discussed in the literature review. The student work will contain work samples of strategies that include generating questions and rereading as well as samples of student dialogue that incorporates reciprocal teaching and paraphrasing. The teachers will be able to discuss how they will use these strategies in their own classrooms and compare with the examples given with how their students perform with these strategies.

Focus groups. Focus groups will be assigned and the groups will be asked to implement one of the strategies in their own classroom. They will introduce the comprehension strategies to their students once they return to their classroom. Prior to implementation, they will be able to brainstorm with their groups on how they wish to incorporate the strategy with their students. The focus group will meet once a month to discuss with the other group members what worked well with their students and what did not. The group will discuss what they will do to improve what did not work. The teachers will discuss whether, or not, they located different strategies that they incorporated into their classroom instruction and were found to be effective.

Additional workshops and monthly meetings. Additional workshops, with teachers of similar grade levels, will occur monthly and will provide for collaboration on what worked and what did not work since the last meeting. In the additional workshops that will follow, teachers

will share ideas and give examples of other effective comprehension strategies that they can incorporate in the classroom as well. The teachers will be asked to try and use a new strategy in the classroom to see if students' comprehension will improve as well.

Blog. At the completion of the professional development workshop, the teachers will be asked to join a blog with the other members of the workshop. The blog will be created to keep in touch and monitor progress between regular monthly meetings. Teachers will have the opportunity to keep a journal and communicate with other educators who attended the workshop. This way the teachers can share ideas daily with one another.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Teachers and educators often struggle when selecting comprehension strategies to use with their students. Effective comprehension strategies are important in developing critical readers and thinkers in the classroom and in everyday life. Teachers want to know if the strategy or approach they use with their students will promote higher order thinking and if they will produce positive results.

Discussion and Significance

Reflecting back on the scenario that occurred during my time teaching in the Reading Clinic, I now feel like I will be better prepared for when I am placed in a situation where I am not sure what effective comprehension strategy to use with a struggling student. This professional development workshop could be very beneficial for many educators who also wonder about which comprehension strategies to use with their struggling readers.

Attending a professional development that shows how to teach effective comprehension strategies to struggling students is a professional responsibility in which educators should participant. Keeping the importance of student learning in mind is the ultimate goal for teachers and educators involved in the workshop. Therefore, during the professional development, it is important for educators to have mentors and other educators helping with new ideas that can be implemented in classrooms and will positively impact student learning.

The research questions that were the focus of this Master's Project were partially answered. The comprehension strategies, rereading, generating questions, reciprocal teaching,

and paraphrasing, were proven to be effective when used with upper elementary students. The Literary approaches, ScSR and SSR, were also shown to be effective when implemented. The question that was difficult to answer was whether or not the strategies promoted higher order thinking. We know there are more than just the comprehension strategies presented in this professional development and that they may be just as effective.

Considering the difficulty of selecting comprehension strategies to use with their students, teachers would benefit from this professional development workshop and with a continuous connection with other professionals who are also exploring effective strategies. Effective comprehension strategies are important in developing critical readers and thinkers in the classroom. The literature review addressed several effective comprehension strategies such as: rereading, reciprocal teaching, question generating, paraphrasing, and using effective literacy approaches. All of these strategies will enable teachers to provide students with strategies that will help make them critical thinkers and increasing their comprehension skills. The questions that guided this Master's Project were: What are effective comprehension strategies for upper elementary students? Which strategies also promote higher order thinking? Which literacy approaches promote overall comprehension?

The constructivist theory, which guides this Master's Project, indicates that learning is an active process in which the learner is constructing meaning. Appropriate professional development can promote such learning by lasting for several months once the initial workshop is over. There can be monthly meetings, focus groups, or blogging, all of which show that professional development is continuous and promotes lifelong learning. When teachers teach, they are learning along with their students, therefore learning is not just for the students, it is a continuous and active process. This professional development workshop will take time; it will be

a continuous process that can last throughout the school year, demonstrating the constructive theory that is present in this project.

Limitations.

Several limitations occurred and include the following:

- Research used in literature review was focused on upper elementary students, not on early elementary or even high school comprehension, but could be used if adapted appropriately.
- The review included a limited number of strategies and should include more.
- The professional development project was not implemented. Therefore, the results of such a project are unknown.

Suggestions for future research.

Personally, after viewing the effectiveness of rereading, reciprocal teaching, generating questions, and paraphrasing with improving students' comprehension, I now feel better prepared to pick an effective comprehension strategy to use with upper elementary students who are struggling with understanding what they read. I am now better prepared to research other comprehension strategies, such as inferring, making connections, or visualizing and compare them to the ones in this professional development project.

Specific research that can be done would be for teachers and researchers to continue to look at other effective comprehension strategies, such as inferring, making connections, or visualizing. These other strategies could be used in the classroom, by integrating them into the

comprehension strategies used in this project. The teachers could discuss the significance of the new strategies when they meet during their monthly meetings and when they use their blogs.

This topic of effective comprehension strategies will continue to be important for many years to come. Comprehension strategies are not limited to the ones used in this research; many other ones may be available and are just as effective. There will always be new and improved strategies as well as new ways to improve children's reading comprehension, suggesting that research in the future needs to be considerate to the changes that occur.

“Comprehension instruction is not about teaching strategies, for strategies' sake! It is about teaching [students] to use strategies purposefully to read any text for any reason, and to walk away from their reading experiences with a new understanding they may generate still more learning” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 33). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), what counts is that students use strategies to become readers with diverse ideas and opinions. Comprehension strategies are not an end in themselves, but rather a means to understanding.

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Appendix A

Sequence for Professional Development Workshop:

Session one: 30 minutes

- Introduction of today's topic, effective comprehension strategies.
- Hand out outline of events.

Session 2: PowerPoint 1 & ½ hour

- The PowerPoint will be displayed for all teachers to view.
- Discuss in groups: What is effective?
- Explain in detail the comprehension strategies being presented, rereading, question generating, reciprocal teaching, and paraphrasing.
- Explain literacy approaches SSR & ScSR.
- PowerPoint will conclude with explaining the events that follow.

Break

Session 3: Handouts, 2 hours

- The handouts contain packets or pamphlets that explain the strategy and how to use it in your classroom. There will be ideas on how to adapt to your student's needs.
- The teachers will partner up with other teachers to brainstorm a lesson using one of the strategies explained during the PowerPoint.
- The groups will briefly explain their lesson idea to the rest of the groups.
- Questions and comments will be accepted.
- Teachers will look at student work, where the student was taught a strategy, to see how students use the strategies.

- Teachers will be given resources and websites that help demonstrate these effective comprehension strategies.

Session 4: Assigning focus groups, ½ hour

- Teachers will create focus groups where they will meet once a month to discuss one of the strategies that they implemented into their classroom after the workshop.
- The groups will pick one of the strategies to use, share ideas, and keep in contact with each other between meetings.

Session 5: future meetings/ blog, 45 min- 1 hour.

- Teachers will discuss meeting once a month during the rest of the school year.
- Decide if groups want to keep a blog or some other form of keeping in contact, all group members must keep in touch between meetings.

Appendix B

Workshop Activities

Topic	Activity	Source & Concept
PowerPoint	Educators will watch a PowerPoint containing the plan for the professional development. The PP will discuss effective comprehension strategies and literacy approaches to help promote comprehension growth in upper elementary students.	McKenna, Labbo, Reinking, & Zucker (2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talked about having visuals to demonstrate importance of topic.
Hands-on Activities/ Pamphlets	Educators will be able to work in groups and experience each strategy. Pamphlets will be handed on discussing each strategy in detail with examples as well.	Bean & Morewood (2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed using hands on materials to reinforce topic.
Examples of Student Work	The participants in the professional development will be able to see student work of each of the strategies used in a classroom of upper elementary students.	Harvey & Goudvis (2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authors talked about using examples of student work to see how to introduce new potential topic.
Additional Workshops/ Monthly Meetings	Educators will meet for additional workshops to discuss other effective comprehension strategies. Meeting monthly will help keep up with the ever changing teaching habits and to discuss possible new strategies.	Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authors talked about the importance about continuing professional development with more meetings and additional workshops.
Focus Groups	Educators will be assigned into smaller focus groups to be able to communicate the importance and usage of the strategies with other colleagues in similar grades.	Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon (2001) and Bean & Morewood (2007). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed using focus groups to organize more meetings after one day professional development workshop.

Blog	Educators will join a blog with colleagues to keep in touch between monthly meetings, they can journal daily, ask questions, or leave comments about the comprehension strategies used or possible new effective comprehension strategies.	McKenna, Labbo, Reinking, & Zucker (2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A way to incorporate technology to monitor progress once the one day workshop is over.
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