Audio Transcript – Reading To Learn: Comprehension Instruction

Welcome to the interactive, professional development program, ***Reading to Learn: Comprehension Instruction.*** This program is suitable for all educators, pre-K through 12 - regardless of content area. It is intended to show how to help students better understand what they read. It is extremely important to our society that we graduate citizens who can read and comprehend what they read. Thus, it is the job of teachers of every subject to explicitly teach, monitor, and reinforce reading comprehension skills.

There are many components to this professional development program, including mini-seminars, journal article readings, Internet links, a Reflection journal and a website with additional readings and resources.

To use this program effectively, and gain the most from this course, you must do the following: View the mini-seminars that provide an overview of reading comprehension instruction. Read the rich body of knowledge provided through the journal articles and other text links. Use the reflection journal to process information, compare it to what you already know and do, and find ways to enhance your classroom instruction based on this body of research. Use the Internet links to find additional information on this topic and to update information on the CD-ROM.

Finally, find ways to share this resource with your colleagues, inform families about the importance of reading, and seek out additional sources of professional development on reading comprehension instruction.

Section 1a02
Processes/Introduction/Background

Script
The MVP professional development series includes two courses on reading instruction: ***Learning to Read: Beginning Reading Instruction***, and ***Reading to Learn: Comprehension Instruction***.

In the program ***Learning to Read***, we examined effective research-based practices in beginning reading instruction.

The main emphasis was on developing the lower level reading skills to a point of fluency and automaticity.

These skills include phonological awareness, decoding, word recognition and fluency.

Being able to read fluently and accurately frees cognitive resources to allow readers to focus on higher level thinking processes necessary for comprehension.

However, comprehension is ***not*** developed *separately* from decoding and fluency.

Word recognition, decoding, fluency and comprehension are developed *simultaneously from the very beginning of reading instruction*.

Language study, word study, fluency practice and comprehension strategy development are important pieces of reading instruction throughout the school years.

This program, ***Reading to Learn***, will explain the factors involved in reading comprehension, and will provide information on how this impacts classroom practices.

The first section of this program is called "Processes." The mini-seminars in this section will focus on how the learner, the task and the text influence reading comprehension.

The next section of this program, labeled "Instruction" will focus on how reading comprehension instruction can affect reading achievement.

Follow these steps for learning: View the mini-seminars. As you do, jot down notes and ideas about how the presentation material relates to your classroom practice.

Read the articles and other text files associated with each section. Discuss and reflect.

The facilitator will present activities to help you synthesize the information, practice some of the techniques, and prepare lessons and activities for your classroom.

Section 1a03
Processes/Introduction/Research Themes

One of the main goals of this course is to provide information about significant research-based factors critical to reading comprehension.

Research indicates that comprehension is not a passive, skills-based activity.

Instead, reading is constructive, active, strategic, and holistic.

Comprehension requires intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text.

Reading comprehension is a complex, cognitive process of constructing meaning from text.

Research also indicates comprehension is impacted by vocabulary knowledge and knowledge of text structure.

Prerequisites for successful reading comprehension ability include:

An ability to read words accurately and fluently, resulting in a good foundation for progressing well in comprehension;

Fluent, oral language skill, conversational ability, and knowledge of word meanings;

Well developed world knowledge;

Home, classroom and sociocultural interactions that influence motivation, participation and access to text;

And rich exposure to literary experiences.

In the seminars that follow, we will look at how characteristics of the learner impact comprehension, and how the reading task and the text itself influences learners' comprehension achievement.

Section 1b01
Processes/Learner/Prior Knowledge

Research into the cognitive processes of reading has shown that reading is an active process.

Readers construct meaning by thinking about what they know already and connecting it with new information they encounter in text.

As we learn about the world, we build a network of knowledge structures.

These knowledge structures constantly change as we experience and read about new things.

These knowledge structures as a whole make up what is termed "prior knowledge."

Our prior knowledge affects how we absorb and process text as we read.

Prior knowledge also lets us retrieve from memory important information we need for comprehension.

Those with less developed prior knowledge structures or those who don't have the required prerequisite prior knowledge will experience more difficulty comprehending.

Each person's set of knowledge structures is different because our experiences are different. The meaning we construct from reading, therefore, is our own.

Our comprehension resembles what the author meant and what other readers comprehend from the same text, but no reader develops exactly the same meaning from a single piece of text.

A very important research contribution that helps us to understand how prior knowledge impacts reading comprehension is schema theory.

For an in-depth explanation of schema theory and its implications for instruction, read the article: *Role of the reader's schema in comprehension, learning and memory,* by Richard Anderson, (article 1 on the tabs below).

What this research tells us as educators is this: When readers with different levels of prior knowledge read the same text, they comprehend differently.

Those with prior knowledge structures that do not match the text, especially those with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, have more difficulty with comprehension.

The learner's prior knowledge is an important consideration as we think about ways to enhance reading comprehension achievement.

Later in this course, in the section labeled "Instruction," we will look at ways to help students build and activate their prior knowledge in order to increase comprehension.

Section 1b02
Processes/Learner/Good Readers

Through research, we know what good readers do when they read in order to comprehend, and what poor readers fail to do.

From this information, we as educators can help poor readers work toward expertise.

The next sections will focus on what we know about high-achieving and low-achieving readers.

What do good readers do when they read? Research indicates that before reading, good readers tend to set goals for their reading.

They pay attention to how the text is organized;

They actively search for connections between what they know and what they are reading.

They read words accurately and quickly, know the meanings of the words they read,

And connect the meaning of one phrase or sentence to another.

They think about what they already know to understand new information and make predictions;

They interact with text by asking themselves questions and reflecting on what they have read.

They think about how the text fits in with what they already know.

Good readers read selectively, often skipping over parts they already understand, or those that are less important.

Good readers look for clues in the text to determine what the author has not directly stated, or by thinking about what they already know.

Good readers apply repair procedures when they are having difficulty understanding. For example, they may reread difficult sections, rephrase a passage in their own words or outline the content.

Good readers connect the text they are reading to other texts, and other life experiences.

These actions that good readers take while reading are called comprehension strategies.

High-achieving readers are said to be "strategic readers."

To quickly review, reading strategically requires learners to:

set goals for reading,

be attentive to text structure and organization,

actively search for connections to their prior knowledge,

know the meanings of words,

interact with text,

monitor understanding and apply repair procedures when necessary,

read selectively,

make inferences,

connect text to other reading and life experiences.

Section 1b03
Processes/Learner/Poor Readers

Poor readers, in contrast, do not use the strategies that good readers use. They also do not have enough awareness about their own thinking processes to apply strategies that help comprehension.

For example, poor readers rarely set goals for reading or consider the type of text when reading.

They may have difficulty decoding words, understanding vocabulary, and they often read very slowly.

They spend so much cognitive attention on figuring out the words, they have little brainpower left to comprehend.

Poor readers often lack the prior knowledge needed to comprehend new text,

Or are unable to activate the knowledge they have.

They rarely ask themselves questions about what they are reading, connect what they are reading to other texts, or seek out additional information on a topic.

Poor readers quickly lose confidence in their ability to read.

They do not read often and lose out on opportunities to improve reading ability and increase world knowledge.

The gap between good readers and struggling readers widens as good readers read more, practice more, and learn more than poor readers.

As poor readers move up in grade level, the texts become more and more difficult and frustrating.

This is not to say that good readers are always good readers and poor readers are always poor readers. An important consideration is the learner's relationship to the text.

Lack of prior knowledge about a topic may affect our ability to use strategies effectively.

Do you have the prior knowledge to be a "good reader" when reading your auto insurance policy?
What about a graduate level physics textbook?

In the same light, poor readers fare better when reading about a topic concerning their culture or heritage, or a topic on which they have a great deal of prior knowledge.

Keep in mind that *many* learner characteristics affect reading comprehension. These include:

Having the ability to read with a high-degree of fluency,

Having the appropriate prior knowledge for the subject,

Being able to activate this prior knowledge,

Knowing appropriate strategies for comprehension,

And being able to appropriately apply strategies.

Other learner characteristics that can affect comprehension include text structure knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and motivation. We will learn more about those later.

Section 1c01
Processes/Task

Learning to read is a long-term developmental process. In the end, we hope that adult readers are able to read with ease and interest a wide variety of materials for a multitude of purposes.

Comprehension should occur even when the material is difficult or uninteresting.

This ability relies in part on understanding that the reading task influences our approach to reading.

Expert readers are purposeful. They read with specific goals in mind and adjust their reading approach according to these goals.

Common reading tasks include reading to:
- gain pleasure,
- acquire knowledge,
- get the "gist" of a passage,

perform a task,
find specific information,
solve a problem,
or, overcome reading failure, as in rereading a difficult passage.

When we read for entertainment, we may skip over parts we aren't interested in to get to the parts we like. We may read certain parts more slowly, focusing on the sound or meter of the language. We may read the ending first, and then go back to see how the text progresses. We usually don't study the book in the same way we would if we were being tested on it.

When we read to acquire knowledge, we look for the specific details and examples that will help us understand what we need to know about a subject. We may consult various texts about the same subject and compare information. We often take notes, outline and summarize. We make attempts to process information as we read and synthesize it with what we know about the subject.

When we read to get the "gist" of a passage, we read at a faster pace. We look to find a summary statement to explain what the passage is mostly about. We would not try to memorize specific details or examples.

When we read to perform a task, we read to understand specific steps in a process and procedural information. We often skip over details that don't affect the way we carry out the procedure. We look for signal words such as *first, second, next,* etc. We also look for phrases like "It is important to, Do not forget to," and other phrases that reveal critical importance.

When we read to find specific information, we scan for key words that will lead us to the information we are seeking. We utilize headers and table of contents to point us to what we want.

When we read to solve a problem, we also scan for information about what we are looking to solve. We skip over information that does not relate to our issue. This kind of reading makes "Frequently Asked Questions" texts and "Troubleshooting Guides" very popular.

When reading for any of the above purposes, we may find that we do not comprehend. Perhaps our minds start to wander, or we are interrupted. Perhaps the vocabulary level is very high, or the author used a great deal of figurative

language, or inferences. When this happens, we adjust our reading task for better understanding.

We may read more slowly, look up word definitions, or consult with another reader for help and clarification.

Sometimes we give up, as in the case of the instructions that come with our VCRs!

The more developed our strategy knowledge is, however, the more we will be able to adjust our reading to fit the task and level of difficulty.

Expert readers change what they do while reading, depending on the reading task.

As educators, we can instruct novice readers to recognize and consider the reading task, and help them adjust their strategies to fit this task. We will learn more about this in the section labeled "Instruction."

Section 1d01
Processes/Text/Text Matters

Another important factor in reading comprehension is the text itself. That might sound obvious at first, but research studies have given us a great deal of information on text structures, text features and text quality.

All have an impact on comprehension. In short, TEXT MATTERS.

Let's look at two types of text: Narrative text and Expository text.

Narratives, such as stories with a setting, characters, problem and resolution, are easier to comprehend. Learners come to school familiar with stories and movie plots. They know what to expect -- the story will have characters, events and actions, and a resolution.

Expository texts are usually meant to inform. They usually tell, describe, or explain an idea, an event or a process. Examples include textbooks, newspapers, and pamphlets.

Learners tend to have less prior experience with expository texts, and do not always understand how expository texts are organized.

Another reason learners have more difficulty with expository texts is that comprehension is affected by ***how well*** a text is organized.

Like whether it has topic headings and subheadings, signal words (such as first, second, finally, in contrast to, similarly) and a clear pattern of main idea and supporting details.

Another factor in how well learners understand what they read is that some texts communicate information better than others.

Students better comprehend texts that explicitly state the main idea, provide sequenced supporting details, and clarify how ideas relate to each other.

Students with diverse backgrounds who may lack the prior knowledge for such texts especially struggle with more difficult or poorly organized text.

It is important to remember how the text itself affects what we understand when we read. Is it expository text or narrative?

Is it well organized or poorly organized?

Is it well written or poorly written?

Do we have the appropriate prior knowledge for the text, or is it about a subject we are totally unfamiliar with?

Does it contain difficult vocabulary or dense concepts?

All of these factors affect comprehension, and should be considered as we attempt to comprehend what we read.

Section 1d02
Processes/Text/What's Next

In the next section of this program, we will look at ways to prepare students to read different types of text, to understand the purposes for reading, and to learn to use the strategies that expert readers use to understand what they read.

We have specifically centered on research-based strategies that may be less widely known to educators.

Some more well known teacher and learner strategies, such as using anticipation guides to activate prior knowledge, creating a story map to aid comprehension of narratives, and using graphic organizers to explain science concepts will be briefly explained.

We will present more detailed information, however, on the following subjects:
Text structure and the implications for instruction,

Effective vocabulary instruction;

Scaffolding and modeling;

Teaching comprehension strategies explicitly;

Finding ways to increase engagement;

And assessing students to identify reading development concerns such as decoding or fluency problems.

We urge you to review the mini-seminars, read the full-text articles found in the reference section,

Use your reflection journal to consider how these ideas relate to your own classroom instruction, discuss and share ideas with colleagues,

And visit the website for further study on reading comprehension.

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion before moving on to the next set of seminars.

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Section 2a01
Instruction/Text/Issues

This seminar will explain:
The differences between narrative and expository texts in relation to comprehension issues;

And research-based approaches that help students better understand all types of text structure.

Let's review the two main categories of text type: Narrative and Expository.

A **narrative text** is a story usually written to entertain.

A narrative has characters with motives and goals in a particular cultural setting.

Narratives illustrate situations, actions and emotions. They can be fiction or based on actual events.

Types of narratives include short stories, novels, myths, fables, comedies and tragedies.

Expository texts are usually meant to inform. They usually tell, describe, or explain an idea, an event or a process.

Learners have more difficulty comprehending expository texts.

Narratives are easier for them to understand. Why is this? The following information helps answer this question.

Most children come to school familiar with the structure of a narrative. They know about stories, fairy tales, and movie plots.

Their experiences with stories have given them a schema of the narrative structure on which to build knowledge.

In contrast, many students do not have a schema for expository structure. Even non-fiction for early elementary texts is often written in narrative form.

Therefore, experience with expository text is limited until the 3rd or fourth grade. Because of this lack of experience, and because of other factors we will discuss later, students **will struggle more** with expository texts.

Researchers have concluded, however, that students' awareness of text structure organization and the strategic use of this structure can help them when reading narrative text AND ESPECIALLY expository text.

In the following seminars, we will discuss how to help students understand the differences between narrative and expository text structures.

Section 2a02
Instruction/Text/Narrative Structure

Students who enter elementary school with lots of experience with narrative structure are those who have been read to at home or at pre-school. These students have a head start on reading comprehension because of this experience.

Students who come from environments less rich in literary experiences will need more explicit instruction on story elements.

It is important, however, that all learners have a common language with which to discuss and write about stories. Story grammar is one way to explain narrative structure and provide for this common language.

Story grammar refers to the important parts of the story: the setting, the characters, the problem or situation, the rising action, the climax or high point of action, the resolution, and the theme or main point.

Creating a story grammar helps readers form a frame or pattern to store information about the story into long-term memory. Researchers have developed several versions of story grammar. You may want to read about these in the text links associated with this seminar. Researchers agree that effective story grammar instruction includes:

Modeling the identification of story parts by "thinking aloud" during reading.

Teacher modeling of story comprehension should begin very early- in pre-school during read aloud time, and continue through all of the grades.

Then model the process of retelling the story orally and through writing, using the elements as a structural frame.

Provide scaffolded support until students can do this on their own.

Writing helps clarify understanding of text and should be used to facilitate comprehension.

In the very early grades, students may use pictures to retell a story.

For students who have less experience with narratives and for the purposes of providing a common language for discussing and writing about narratives, the following methods are encouraged:

- Explicitly teach the story elements, such as setting, main character, problem, actions, resolution, theme;

- Explain how these elements help readers understand and answer questions about a story.

Section 2a03
Instruction/Text/More About Narratives

Another interesting way to talk about narrative structure in the classroom is by using the **Chain of Events story analysis.**

The information for this section is taken from the book*, Content area reading: Literacy and learning across the curriculum* by Richard Vacca and JoAnne Vacca.

To teach learners about the chain of events narrative structure, explain the following: Most stories have a main character in a setting (or several settings).

The plot of the story is made of events or episodes.
These elements form a causal chain of events that typically consists of:

An initiating event - something that sets other events in motion;

An internal response – the character's reaction to this event, forcing the character to set a goal or solve a problem;

An attempt or attempts – the character's efforts to reach the goal or solve the problem;

An outcome – the success or failure of the attempt or attempts;

A resolution – what happens as a result of this success or failure;

A reaction – when the character expresses feelings about how the goal was met or the problem solved, or when the author connects the story to a broader, more universal theme.

When readers interact with the structure of a story by identifying these elements, they have more success comprehending ***and*** retaining information.

The process of determining theme allows readers to personally interact with the text.

Interpretation of theme is impacted by prior knowledge and experiences. This personal interaction allows readers to connect the story to their own lives and schemas. This connection provides an avenue for retention and growth.

Again, writing personal responses to stories, and using story elements to build a frame for comprehension, helps readers comprehend narrative texts.

It is very important to first model these behaviors.

Then, provide support while students learn to use a chain of events structure to react to a story.

Section 2a04
Instruction/Text/Expository Text

Why do educators experience difficulty getting students to read and understand subject matter textbooks?

We discussed earlier that learners come to school more familiar with narratives. They struggle with understanding the structure of expository text, which is very different from narrative text.

Another issue is the way expository texts are organized. Some expository texts are easier to comprehend than others.

For instance, students better comprehend reader-friendly texts that are:
Clearly written with explicit main ideas;

Have systematically sequenced supporting details;

And provide explanations of how concepts relate to each other.

Reader-friendly texts contain headings, subheadings, and signal words.

They provide background knowledge and in-context vocabulary definitions.

We refer to this as "coherent text."

We all know, however, that many texts we use on a daily basis DO NOT meet these guidelines. Researchers have found many textbooks in classrooms are incoherent.

They seldom explicitly state main ideas.

They fail to make clear relationships between concepts.

They cover topics by giving facts, but contain little analysis.

Furthermore, some readers, especially those from diverse backgrounds, have trouble even with well-written, reader-friendly texts.

The good news? Research indicates learners who are specifically taught about text structures, such as cause and effect and comparison/contrast, learn to comprehend expository texts better.

Practice writing the various types of text structures also helps students to recognize such patterns when they read.

Learning strategies for understanding poorly organized or very difficult texts also positively affects comprehension.

Two main elements of expository text structure are external text structure and internal structure.

External text structure is the text's format features – like the table of contents, glossary, headings and subheadings, graphs, illustrations, summary statements and questions.

Explain these features to learners, and model how they can be used to support understanding.

Internal text structure refers to the organization of the text and how the text connects relationships - such as the main idea and supporting details.

The next section describes the main types of expository structure, and how to use this information in the classroom to increase comprehension of expository text.

Section 2a05
Instruction/Text/Types

Expository texts are usually meant to inform. They usually tell, describe, or explain an idea, an event or a process.

Researchers have concluded that students' awareness of text structure organization and the strategic use of this structure can aid comprehension.

The most common type of text structure found in textbooks is description. Description portrays characteristics, traits and features about a topic. A description might contain qualifying elements such as size or importance.

It does not usually contain signal words.

Another type of expository text is sequence. Here, facts, events or concepts are put into a specific order.

Signal words are often used, such as **first**, **second**, **then**, **next**, **before, after**, and **finally.**

The cause and effect passage shows how certain concepts or events occur as a result of other concepts or events.

The signal words often used include **so that, because of, as a result**, and **since**.

A comparison/contrast passage relates the likenesses and/or the differences among subjects.

The signal words include words and phrases like **in the same way**, **like, similarly, unlike, on the other hand,** and **as opposed to.**

A problem/solution text tells the development of a problem, its causes and solutions.

Signal phrases include **the problem is, the problem occurs when, a solution is**, and **the problem is solved by**.

Researchers recommend the following for effective instruction on text structure:

Make sure you have good models for each structure. A good model is sometimes hard to find. It must be one that very clearly falls into the category you are trying to explain.

For instance, using a model for problem/solution that could also be labeled as description might confuse your students.

Keep in mind that most textbooks use a variety of text structures within the text.

The text may use cause/effect paragraphs to explain how the American Revolution began,

And then switch to description to depict a battle scene.

Then use comparison/contrast to describe the ideological differences between British citizens and American colonists.

Again, finding good models to introduce learners to the different text types, with the proper signal phrases, may be difficult. It might be best to write your own models for each type of expository structure.

Use writing as a tool for teaching the different structures. Having students write a paragraph employing specific text structures, such as cause and effect, helps them recognize those patterns when they read.

Use a graphic organizer with each structure to help students visualize the text. The next section will provide examples of graphic aids to use for different text structures.

Section 2a06
Instruction/Text/Instructional Aids

The following provides examples of questions and graphic organizers to use for each type of structure described in the previous section.

Description:
What is being described?
What are its qualities?

A bubble map provides a graphic aid to help students pull details from the text.

Sequence:
What happened?
What is the order of the events?

A flow chart or a timeline can help students with this structure.

Cause and Effect:
What happens?
What causes it to happen?

A graphic aid for this might be a cause/effect map.

Comparison/Contrast
What things are being compared and contrasted?
How are they alike?
How are they different?

A Venn diagram is one effective graphic organizer for this structure.

Problem/Solution:
What is the problem?
What is the effect of the problem?
What are possible solutions?
What solutions are attempted?
What are the results of the solutions?
Is the problem solved?
Are new problems now occurring?

A problem/solution outline provides a way for students to organize this information.

Modeling and scaffolding play a crucial role in teaching text structure. In the pre-kindergarten through second grade years, teachers begin modeling through "think alouds" during reading.

As texts become more difficult, teachers provide examples of text structure analysis and summarization.

Students slowly begin to assume more and more responsibility for the analysis and summary tasks.

The teacher provides support as needed as students learn:
Authors are fallible;

Paying attention to text structure helps in constructing meaning;

And reading comprehension can be improved through writing.

Finally, it is not always possible to use reader-friendly text. When using a text that is particularly difficult or incoherent, follow these guidelines:

Set a clear purpose for reading and activate prior knowledge on the topic;

Choose only parts of the text for the students to read themselves;

Read aloud more difficult parts. They will better understand the text, and improve their listening comprehension;

And use visual aids to clarify and organize information.

Please consult the text links at the bottom of your screen for more information and sample lessons for teaching text structure.

Additional resources for classroom instruction on this topic are listed on your screen:

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion before moving on to the next seminar.

Section 2b01
Instruction/Vocabulary/Background

Research indicates that vocabulary knowledge is a major factor in reading comprehension.

Note that when we use the term *vocabulary knowledge*, we are referring to the ***meanings of words***. We are ***not*** referring to sight-word knowledge.

Sight word knowledge refers to fluently sounding a word out when reading, such as a 4th grader reading the word "turbulence" and pronouncing it correctly.

The ability to *read words* is not what we mean by **vocabulary knowledge**.

What is meant by vocabulary knowledge is this: Does the reader know what the word *turbulence* means?

Does that reader have a deep knowledge or surface knowledge of that word?

Is lack of knowledge about the word going to affect comprehension of the passage? Those are the issues we will discuss in this seminar.

Research has not yet given us a complete picture of the causal link between vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Does a poor vocabulary cause poor reading comprehension? Or, do readers with good comprehension have rich vocabularies because they read so widely and effectively?

We know for sure, however, that if readers don't know the meanings of words critical to understanding a passage, comprehension will suffer.

Keep in mind there are different levels of word knowledge.

A meteorologist's understanding of the word "hurricane" is much deeper than the general population's

A third grader's understanding of the word hurricane is even simpler.

Through repeated encounters with words through different contexts, our definitions of words grow and change.

As that 3rd grader reads more about hurricanes, listens to weather forecasting information, experiences first hand a storm with hurricane-like winds, understanding of the word "hurricane" is deepened.

This happens with much of our language. Take a two-year old's understanding of the word "fire" - something hot fire fighters put out.

With more experience, the child learns the causes of fire, the damage fire can do, examples of good fires, such as campfires and woodstove fires, and how to prevent fires.

Further exposure to the word reveals we can *fire* artillery or *fire* questions.

We can see *fire* in a diamond or in someone's eyes. Our definitions evolve and grow throughout our lives, and these levels of word knowledge affect how we comprehend what we read.

Our knowledge of word meanings must be not only accurate and rich, but we must also be able to retrieve words from our memory easily in order to affect comprehension.

Research indicates children learn between 1000 and 5000 words a year. Different studies have resulted in various conclusions, so this number is difficult to report.

What we do know is that some children learn words at a lower rate than others. Children who have been read to a great deal have much wider vocabularies.

Children who come from non-English speaking households may have a large vocabulary in their native language, but may know fewer English vocabulary words than their native-English speaking peers.

It is essential to help these children increase their knowledge of English word meanings. Furthermore, those learners who struggle during beginning reading development may quickly fall behind their peers in word meaning knowledge.

In fact, because poor readers tend to read far less than better readers, the gap between poor readers and good readers widens as they progress through school.

Poor readers read less, are exposed to far less vocabulary and become increasingly frustrated as texts become more difficult to understand.

Finding ways to increase vocabulary knowledge is critical for effective reading comprehension.

Section 2b02
Instruction/Vocabulary/Exposure

We know that vocabulary growth occurs mainly through reading or hearing words in context.

Differences in the amount of text exposure relates to differences in word knowledge among readers.

Effective instruction to increase vocabulary knowledge, therefore, involves increasing exposure to text.

As educators, one of the most important things we can do is read aloud to our students and have them read on their own ***every day.***

Keep in mind the following:

Repeated readings of stories, nursery rhymes and poems help provide repeated exposure to vocabulary;

When reading aloud, identify and point to unknown words;

Have students discuss new words;

Have students listen to different types of text: fiction, non-fiction, biography, newspapers, electronic literature, magazine articles.

Provide different types of text for students to read on their own;

Stimulate discussion and learning about language and vocabulary by using word play books, puns, jokes and riddles;

Provide time to read, share and talk about books;

Encourage students to be active, independent word learners;

Have a wide variety and a large number of books, magazines, and other text sources available for students; and

Stress to families the importance of reading daily.

Section 2b03
Instruction/Vocabulary/Direct Instruction

Teaching word meanings directly also helps increase vocabulary knowledge.

Researchers estimate that students can be taught as many as 300 words a year through direct instruction.

This would especially seem to help those who are already behind in vocabulary knowledge, and are learning fewer words a year through context.

Direct instruction must be ***productive*** instruction.

Productive instruction means that students learn not only word definitions, but also something about the words that will improve their bank of word knowledge.
They will learn to look at word parts to discover meaning.

They will learn in-depth knowledge of words and will have such repeated exposure to these words that they can easily be retrieved and processed from memory during reading.

A common but problematic approach to vocabulary instruction is having students look up words in a dictionary and then write sentences with these words.

Dictionaries do not give complete definitions, and can often cause misconceptions about meanings.

Better approaches include:

Giving students personal, easy to understand definitions instead of having them look them up in dictionaries;

Having discussions and activities that help students understand new words and how they relate to known words;

Showing students how to look at word parts to discover meaning;

Providing varied contexts or anecdotes that help create a lasting memory of words;

Providing synonyms and antonyms, rich examples and non-examples;

Having students create a story, draw a picture, act out a definition; and

Using silly questions to increase exposure.

Deep knowledge of a word comes from ***many*** exposures to the word in ***rich*** contexts.

Recall the 4th grader reading the word *turbulence*. He has heard that word on an airplane, in the context of the pilot asking travelers to remain seated due to turbulence.

Understanding of the definition is limited to turbulence experienced in flight, but it serves as a starting place for a discussion of the word's meaning.

Through studying the Civil war as a time of *turbulence* and confusion, the learner's definition grows to also mean "disorder" and "upheaval."

The teacher may have asked the students to write about a time in their lives that was filled with *turbulence*.

Then the teacher reads aloud the word found in a newspaper article about the *turbulence* that occurred during a riot.

The students discuss words with the same root, such as *turbocharger* and *turbine*.

This knowledge deepens further when the reader comes across the term in science, referring to certain gases and liquids in chemistry.

Remember, it is ***repeated exposure in rich contexts*** that most ***positively affects*** reading comprehension.

Section 2b04
Instruction/Vocabulary/Conceptual Approach

Another approach to vocabulary instruction is the conceptual approach. This approach is most likely to directly affect reading comprehension.

Not all words should be taught using this approach – use a simple definition when one will do. However, when a word is central to understanding, or when deep knowledge of a word will lead to knowledge of more words, the conceptual approach helps to:

Integrate new words into prior knowledge and known words;

Provide enough repeated exposure needed to really learn words; and,

Provide lots of opportunities for meaningful, rich discussion and use of the words in context.

The following information comes from a booklet entitled "Vocabulary Development" by Steven A. Stahl.

Semantic mapping is a technique where a main concept is presented to a group of students. The group brainstorms other words related to this concept that they already know. They discuss the definitions of these words and how they relate to the concept.

The teacher, meanwhile, adds words to the brainstorming list that have been targeted as new words to learn.

Through active discussion and drawing a "map" of the words and how they relate, students learn the targeted words. This technique helps students comprehend passages with the new words and understand how they relate to the concept.

Semantic feature analysis is similar to semantic mapping, but a grid is used. Written on one side of the grid are members of a class of concepts. Across the top are features related to the concepts. The students discuss whether the feature relates to the concept.

The chart is marked with a plus sign if the feature aligns with the concept, a minus sign if it does not, and a question mark if it sometimes does.

Discussion is the critical component of this technique, which draws upon prior knowledge and allows for introduction of new, related terms. Students discuss ambiguities in determining if certain features fit various members of a concept, and through this rich discussion, clarification of the concept occurs.

Possible sentences is an activity where the teacher chooses six to eight difficult words from a content area text before reading. The teacher also chooses four to six known words central to the passage.

The words are put on the board, with a simple definition if needed. The students are asked to create sentences they think might be in the text using at least two of the words on the board.

Using at least two words compels students to explore possible relationships among the words.

Then the text is read.

Next, the teacher asks the students to look at the sentences on the board and decide whether or not they are true according to what they have read in the text.

If they are not true, they are asked to change the sentence to make it true.

The discussion and evaluation of the sentences allows students to process semantic knowledge.

A **concept-of-definition map** approach involves asking students to define a concept by discussing critical attributes, listing examples and non-examples, and placing the concept or word into a specific category.

Comparison and contrast can be used to deepen knowledge of key concepts.

A Venn diagram can depict how concepts differ and how they are similar.

A simple chart can also help distinguish characteristics from examples.

Through discussion and activation of prior knowledge, these conceptual approaches to vocabulary development can improve comprehension.

Both small and large group discussions have been found to be effective.

Essential to success, however, is careful consideration by the teacher of which words and concepts best fit these methods.

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion before moving on to the next seminar.

Section 2c01
Instruction/Practice/Guidelines

Some studies have shown that reading comprehension is not explicitly taught in many classrooms. Comprehension is mentioned. Comprehension is tested. But often not explicitly taught. Why is research-based comprehension instruction currently not more widespread? Reasons may include the following:

The complex processes of reading comprehension are often not known by educators;

Comprehension instruction requires educators to use alternative teaching techniques such as scaffolding and mental modeling – these techniques take time and practice to develop;

And educators need more training and support in the area of comprehension instruction.

We know the preparation of teachers to deliver effective, in-depth, explicit reading comprehension instruction is linked to students' reading comprehension performance.

The key is to provide struggling readers with instruction that teaches them the strategies that good readers employ, and helps them develop awareness of their own thinking processes to recognize **how and when** to use these strategies.

In the previous seminars we discussed the importance of understanding the purposes for reading, knowing about the types of texts and their structures, and developing a rich vocabulary.

This seminar will discuss how to help students learn strategies for improving interaction with and understanding of text.

First, we will look at general guidelines to comprehension instruction.

One: Use scaffolding during comprehension instruction. The first step in scaffolding instruction is to model the behavior you want the students to use.

The next step is to have students begin to "help" you with the comprehension task. Through guided practice, students take over comprehension tasks slowly, one-by-one, until they can complete the process.

There will be times when the teacher must step back in and offer specific support when the students are having difficulty.

Recall the seminar on text structure. Using scaffolded instruction, the teacher might read aloud a comparison/contrast passage. Then the teacher might say aloud, "I see the signal words "similarly" and "like."

"I think this passage is comparing two things."

"I wonder if I can draw a chart to list what the passage is saying about this topic." The teacher then demonstrates how to create a graphic organizer using the comparison/contrast text.

The next step might be to have students help create a graphic organizer with another comparison/contrast passage. This might first be through a whole-class brainstorming session, or students might work in collaborative groups before trying it on their own.

Begin strategy instruction with an easy text before moving on to more difficult texts, as students build ability and confidence.

The instruction should work toward having students recognize comparison/contrast passages on their own, and use their knowledge about the text structure to interact with the text for understanding –and finding ways to use the text's organization to remember what they have read.

Two: Modeling and thinking aloud are effective teacher practices that can improve reading comprehension.

While reading with students, stop at points in a text and ask aloud, "I wonder what the author is trying to say here?"

Or, "I'm not sure I understand what that means. I better re-read."

Seek out opportunities to model and think aloud. Examples include:
Modeling the process of understanding vocabulary from context;

Modeling the skill of inferencing - when an author expects the reader to "read between the lines;"

Modeling the process of connecting new information to what you already know;

And modeling the act of summarizing, clarifying and synthesizing.

Janet Allen writes about modeling high-level vocabulary in her text *Words, Words, Words: Teaching Vocabulary in Grades 4-12:*

When students ask me for a pen or pencil, I had one of two responses. "Sure you can. I seem to have a plethora of pencils today."

or "Sorry, I seem to have a dearth of pencils today." Modeling more advanced levels of language helps students absorb the vocabulary they need to understand texts.

Three: Remember the point of comprehension instruction is to help students understand what they read. Strategies such as using a KWL chart can often become busy work if they do not help students connect ideas to the text itself.

It's critical to explicitly instruct students why and when and how the strategy is effective.

Students should be taught how to choose and adjust strategies according to the text and task.

Strategies and activities that require students to go back to the text, revisit it, study it and reflect on it impact growth in comprehension ability.

Four: Strategy instruction should be explicit. Specifically tell the students why, when and how one might use a strategy.

Five: Also keep in mind the use of a particular strategy does not apply in all situations. Always be ready to adjust the instruction to fit the needs of your students and the texts they are reading.

In the following sections, we will discuss specific methods for comprehension instruction.

Section 2c02
Instruction/Practice/Building Fluency

One step in increasing comprehension levels is to increase fluency levels. Fluency is the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression. Fluency refers to both oral reading and silent reading.

Why is fluency important? The reading process requires the reader to identify the words on the page and at the same time build the meaning of the sentence or passage. The more fluent readers are, the more brainpower they will have for comprehending what they read.

Sometimes readers are more fluent while reading silently, and have trouble comprehending when they read aloud.

Other learners may have difficulty understanding when they read silently, but can attend to meaning *better* when they read aloud.

Also, one's level of fluency depends greatly on the text. You may have a high level of fluency in reading a murder mystery, but experience less fluency with an engineering textbook.

When we refer to ***building fluency***, this means building oral and silent reading fluency levels, with text that is at the appropriate reading level for the learner.

Note that fluency practice is not a substitute for comprehension instruction. Fluency practice should be used as one piece of a reading instruction framework.

How does one increase fluency? Simply by reading more. Unfortunately, the students who need the most help with fluency are the most reluctant to read. Frustration and reading difficulty cause these learners to seldom read when it is not required.

Paired reading may be one way to help students develop fluency. A key element to paired reading is providing the appropriate level of text. The text should not be too easy or too difficult for the reader.

This is how it works:
Students are paired with a partner. They select their own passage from what they are currently using as class materials. They count out 50 words or so.

Partners choose different passages so as not to create a competition. They read the passage silently, and then decide who will read aloud first. The first reader reads the passage aloud three times.

After each reading, the reader fills out a self-evaluation sheet asking, "How well did I read?"

The listener tells the reader after the second and third reading how he or she improved and records the feedback on a listening sheet.

Then they switch roles. The listener can also help the reader with words if asked to. But the reader should try to pronounce the word for at least 5 seconds before asking for help.

Students must be carefully taught this strategy. Follow these guidelines:
Explain that this paired reading activity will help improve reading – like how a basketball player practices lay-ups over and over to improve skill.

Have the students choose from the materials they are currently reading in class – start with 25 words.

Work individually at first. Have them read the passage silently, then aloud.

Show students how to use the self-evaluation sheet – model this with your own reading and self-evaluation.

Then teach students how to be listeners, and how being a good listener and responder will help their partners improve.

Model the listening process. Read a passage aloud in a monotone or very haltingly. Then read it again with more fluency. Show the listeners how to respond with, "Steve read more smoothly." Or, "Diana knew more words and read with more expression."

Supervise students as they practice the reading and listening roles. Make sure students choose short, interesting passages that end with a complete sentence. Make sure the passages they choose are not too difficult for them. Make sure listeners give positive responses after the second and third reading.

Encourage active listening. The structured format of having to fill out a listening sheet and giving positive comments to the reader keeps the listener on task. Readers increase self-efficacy from hearing positive comments about their reading, something poorer readers are not used to! Also, monitoring others read helps improve **self-**monitoring.

Be sure to provide instruction about working in pairs, such as starting immediately, taking turns, staying on task, using appropriate voice levels, and being an "encourager" rather than a "discourager." Students usually like working in pairs – let them know that these guidelines must be followed or the privilege will not be available to them.

Choosing pairs for this type of activity can be tricky. Different sets of pairs might work in different situations, depending on the text and task. Many practitioners suggest avoiding pairing children with great differences in reading abilities. You may want to support the most struggling readers yourself as they choose reading material. Pair those who can benefit from helping one another together.

Parents can also be trained to serve as partners in paired reading. The goals include:

- Increasing fluency;
- Improving text-selection ability;
- Increasing the skill of self-monitoring; and,
- Increasing positive reading experiences.

Show parents how to serve as a reading partner with the same guidelines students use in the classroom. Explain the importance of building fluency through daily reading opportunities. Guide them in choosing books that are the appropriate level for their child, and show them how to be an "encourager" while listening to their child read.

Section 2c03
Instruction/Practice/Pre-reading

Pre-reading activities have been shown to:

- Increase motivation to read;
- Improve activation of prior knowledge; and,
- Improve ability to make predictions about content.

Pre-reading activities include:

Talking about the text and relating it to students' lives;

Establishing a relevant purpose for reading the text;

And, providing anticipation guides to activate thought about the ideas presented in the text.

An anticipation guide is a series of declarative statements that help focus the reader's attention on certain ideas or issues that will be in the text.

To create an anticipation guide, Vacca and Vacca recommend the following guidelines:
Analyze the text to determine the main ideas, both implicit and explicit.

Write these ideas as short declarative statements to which the students can react.

Discuss these statements in a whole group or small groups. Encourage the students to take a position and defend it with specific examples.

An anticipation guide can also be completed individually, with the students writing their thoughts, positions and examples, and then responding to these ideas after they have read.

Keep in mind writing is a powerful tool for:

- Helping students react to what they have read;
- Clearing up misunderstandings; and,
- Retaining information.

Encourage students to evaluate their reactions to the anticipation guide after they have read the selection.

For more information and specific examples on anticipation guides, click on the links at the bottom of your screen.

The KWL procedure is another technique that can help students activate prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading, especially for expository texts. The KWL chart has spaces for *What I Know, What I Want to Learn* and reviewing *What I Have Learned*.

What I Know – Students discuss and/or write down what they already know about a topic. Students list and organize ideas.

What I Want to Learn – Students write specific ideas or questions they think will be covered in the text.

What I Learned – After reading the text, the students discuss and/or write what they have learned and answer those questions.

An extension, the KWLH chart, has a space for *How I Can Learn More*. After completing *What I Learned*, students generate sources for finding more information on the topic.

Remember: choose activities wisely according to text and purpose- these examples are not all appropriate for all types of text.

There are many other successful pre-reading strategies other than those presented in this program. Use the Internet links associated with this program and the reference list for further study.

Section 2c04
Instruction/Practice/During Reading

This section will describe several activities and strategies that can be used during reading to increase comprehension, including:
Modeling mental processes,
Comprehension monitoring strategies,
And using mental imagery.

Modeling mental processes helps make explicit what good readers do when they read. Mental modeling involves reading aloud from a story or passage and describing in detail the mental maneuvers of the reasoning process.

This process demonstrates how good readers:

- Activate prior knowledge;
- Connect and synthesize information;
- Find meaning of vocabulary through context; and,
- Interpret inferences.

Mental modeling is a process that shows students the flexibility involved in strategic reading.

Strategic readers are able to monitor how well they are comprehending and take corrective steps when they begin to have trouble. Teaching **comprehension monitoring strategies** can help strengthen reading ability, especially as students move to silent reading and reading of expository texts.

One strategy involves having students use a code to record their interactions with content material.

For instance, in a science book the code may be "C" for clear, "D" for difficult, "I" for important, and "S" for surprising. Students monitor while reading and write the code response on strips of paper attached to the margins of the text.

Another version called INSERT, an Interactive Notation System for Effective Reading and Thinking, uses marking cues such as a question mark for "I wonder" and a checkmark for "I agree."

Recording personal responses helps keep the readers on task, helps them become aware of when they are not understanding, and helps them realize when to take corrective action.

Post reading discussions help to clarify areas that are difficult, and serve as a diagnostic tool for teachers to see which skills students need more help with.

Again, this instruction requires direct teacher modeling of the mental processes involved and explicit information on how the code might help comprehension.

Perform guided group practice with small sections of text first, and then move to independent comprehension monitoring.

Using **mental imagery** while reading enhances comprehension. Studies have found, however, that poorer readers don't employ mental imagery strategies unless asked specifically to do so.

Strategic readers, on the other hand, employ mental imagery independently.

Explicitly teaching students how to use mental imagery and explaining the situations and types of texts which best suit this strategy can encourage more independent use of mental imagery.

Start by telling students what mental imagery is and how it can help us understand what we read.

Model the strategy by reading text aloud, and thinking aloud, detailing the mental processes that occur while using mental imagery.

Use guided practice with simple objects in the classroom – having students close their eyes and imagine the details of the object, then compare their mental images and the actual object.

Or have students visualize a room in their home.

Read aloud short passages with description and action, stopping to ask students about their mental images.

Then move on to independent mental imagery tasks, while reading silently.

As students create mental pictures in their minds, they learn to connect the material with their prior knowledge, and learn that experiences shape understanding.

Section 2c05
Instruction/Practice/After Reading

There are countless after-reading activities that increase comprehension. Keep in mind that the best after-reading activities require the learner to go back to the text for information or revisit the text to create meaning, and reflect on how the text relates to prior experiences.

One after-reading activity that requires learners to revisit the text and synthesize information is summary writing. Writing summaries helps learners reduce the text to its main points.

Summary writing can also help the teacher spot misunderstandings about issues in the text.

To create a quality summary, a learner must be able to:

Analyze text structure;

Distinguish important from less important information;

Explicitly state the main idea, even if it is implicit in the text;

Maintain the author's point of view;

And, write succinctly and coherently, even if the text is not succinct or coherent.

Don't expect your students to be able to write quality summaries automatically. Summary writing takes practice.

Model the summary writing procedure by reading a text aloud, explicitly detailing the mental processes involved in ordering, summarizing and inferencing.

Then model the process of writing a summary. Provide guided practice in whole-class or group activities. Use these opportunities to provide feedback as the students learn this skill.

Carefully planned questions posed by the teacher during and after reading help facilitate quality summary writing.

Plan questions carefully by:
Identifying the major points of the text and anticipate problems with inferred meaning or incoherent text;

Segment the text to identify places to stop and clarify meaning;

Develop questions based on the text structure to help students construct meaning.

Writing personal responses also can help students clarify information and connect it to prior knowledge.

Reader responses provide educators with a vehicle to check for misunderstandings as well.

Again, the writing activity should involve the text as well as the learner's own experiences.

Take for example a story about visiting an elderly relative. Instead of a writing prompt that simply asks students to write about a time they visited an elderly relative,

Extend the prompt to include something that asks the learner to go back to the text for information. Such as, "Explain how your visit was different from the one in the story."

Using the text to create graphic organizers is also a way to get learners to use the text itself to create meaning. Graphic organizers can help students organize and synthesize information.

Remember to model the process of creating the graphic organizer type that you want the students to use.

Let them practice with easier texts first, and then have them move on to more difficult texts.

Learners may benefit from working collaboratively on these type projects. Keep in mind that when working in groups, the assignment must be clear, and the roles of each group member must be defined.

Other post-reading activities include responding through guided discussion, dramatic play, pantomime, music, art, or debate.

Be sure to access the Internet page associated with this course for valuable links to after-reading activities.

Section 2c06
Instruction/Practice/Other Approaches

There are many other effective approaches and activities that can be used effectively in the classroom to increase comprehension -- too many to cover in these mini-seminars.

We suggest you explore the many additional resources and extension materials in this course to enhance your practice.

The following information describes three other specific approaches that have shown to be effective at increasing comprehension achievement. We will briefly describe Reciprocal Teaching, Questioning the Author, and Transactional Strategy Instruction.

Professional development opportunities on these approaches are available for more detailed information and instruction on how to apply them in the classroom.

Reciprocal teaching is a name for a procedure developed by Ann Marie Palincsar and colleagues.

It comprises a dialogue between teachers and students, and uses four comprehension strategies:

- Asking questions;
- Clarifying difficult words and ideas;
- Summarizing what has been read; and,
- Predicting what might come next.

Reciprocal Teaching employs modeling and guided practice with whole class and small group instruction.

As students become more competent, the reading tasks become more challenging. In this approach, students teach themselves to read by modeling the strategies good readers use.

The **Questioning the Author** approach developed by Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, Rebecca Hamilton, and Linda Kucan involves students and teachers working together to read, resolve confusion and understand the meaning of texts.

Teachers carefully pre-read the text to find places where students may have difficulty.

During reading, teachers strategically stop at these places to ask questions such as, "What is the author trying to say here? Why is the author saying this? What is the author getting at?"

Through modeling, the teacher helps students understand:

- Authors are fallible;
- Texts may be difficult and confusing;
- When confusion occurs; don't give up;
- Use comprehension strategies to figure out meaning.

Transactional Strategy Instruction is a comprehensive procedure involving explicit teaching of comprehension strategies.

This approach attempts to help students:
Set goals for reading;

Use background knowledge and text cues to make predictions and construct meaning while reading;

Monitor comprehension;

Effectively use techniques such as visualizing, clarifying, generating questions, and summarizing;

Solve problems encountered while reading;

And, evaluate reading progress.

While using the Transactional Strategy approach, students read aloud in small groups. They are encouraged to engage with the text, describe mental images, relate it to background knowledge, and make personal responses to what they are reading.

All of these approaches have proved successful at helping readers become more independent, engaged and strategic. However, these solutions require careful teacher training and preparation.

They are most effective when teachers have a choice in using the approach and obtain quality professional development and continued support.

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion before moving on to the next seminar.

Section 2d01
Instruction/Engagement/Motivation

Students who read actively for enjoyment and to gain knowledge are referred to as "engaged readers."

Active, engaged readers concentrate on meaning.

They effectively use self-monitoring strategies. They are not easily distracted from the reading task.

They exchange information freely with peers. They seem excited about reading and learning.

Research indicates that engaged readers show higher reading achievement than non-engaged readers.

Engaged readers are ***motivated*** to read. We know that motivation is key to successful achievement. Determining what motivates high achievers can help us identify ways to increase and maintain motivation in all readers.

First, let's look at two types of motivation orientation – task-mastery orientation and performance or "ego" orientation.

Studies indicate that readers with a task-mastery orientation are more likely to be engaged readers. Readers with a task-mastery orientation are intrinsically motivated to improve skills and accept new challenges.

In contrast, readers with a performance orientation are looking to outperform their peers on a task. They are extrinsically motivated by rewards, grades and fear of failure.

They seldom read for enjoyment or to gain knowledge.

Self-efficacy is another aspect of motivation to read. If readers think they are good at reading, they tend to be more motivated to read.

A third aspect is social motivation. Sharing reading experiences with peers in a learning community has a positive effect on the motivation to read.

Section 2d02
Instruction/Engagement/Guidelines

Researchers have identified the following guidelines for enhancing motivation in the classroom:

Create a classroom environment that encourages collaboration and cooperation. Help build a community of learners where students talk about books and help one another learn.

Model the love of literacy by talking about the books you are reading, showing enthusiasm for discovery of learning through texts, and sharing you favorite books and passages. The love of reading is contagious.

Make sure all students succeed at reading.

Help students choose reading tasks that are within their reach – neither too hard nor too easy. At the same time, instruction should help move learners towards choosing increasingly difficult texts.

Use on-going assessment to monitor progress and provide the appropriate level of instructional support.

Teach explicit comprehension strategies.

Encourage all readers to attribute reading success to putting forth more effort. Those who attribute failure to ability rather than effort lack the motivation to try harder.

Help students understand intelligence is not innate or fixed. Intelligence can be gained through learning the strategies "smart" people use while reading - then using these strategies to read more and to acquire in-depth knowledge about the world.

When failure occurs, use it to diagnose student difficulty and provide scaffolded instruction. Show students how to interpret failure as a natural and necessary part of learning.

Don't let students attribute failure to lack of ability. Help them understand that failure indicates the need for more effort.

DO NOT allow failures to persist. Students who need intensive remediation in decoding or fluency should receive it ***before*** they become discouraged.

This means providing intensive phonological awareness instruction in kindergarten and first grade.

This means providing a safety net for first-graders who are not catching on to decoding.

This means providing fluency practice for all elementary students who are not yet fluent.

Even with increased attention to reading proficiency in the elementary grades, some students will arrive at middle school without the necessary skills for reading success.

Middle school and high school teachers in ***all content areas*** play a critical role in diagnosing reading problems and providing intensive instruction. There is simply not enough time in a middle or high school language arts class to provide the necessary reading instruction for deficient readers.

Discourage student competition, which serves to undermine motivation.

Instead, encourage students to set individual learning goals and improve on past performances. Explain that individual improvement is what matters.

Reward students accordingly, grading on improvement. Don't "over reward" literacy activities. Research indicates motivation decreases when students are rewarded for what they enjoy doing.

Allow students to choose what they read as much as possible.

Integrate literacy instruction with content, such as social studies and science. Students are motivated to read about subjects that grab their attention.

Encourage students to find interesting topics and choose appropriate reading materials. In-depth learning about a few, exciting topics builds literacy skills better than "covering" a curriculum.

Helping students learn "how to learn" promotes life-long, engaged reading.

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion before moving on to the next seminar.

Section 2e01
Instruction/Assessment/

When using assessment instruments in the classroom, always keep in mind assessment serves two major purposes:

It informs classroom instruction, and it monitors students' progress toward learning goals. If the assessment does not serve one of these purposes, it is not a worthwhile action.

Assessment should reveal areas of strength and areas of weakness.

Determining strengths helps teachers find ways to positively reinforce learners. This helps build confidence and awareness of what the learners know and can do.

Determining weaknesses helps teachers provide appropriate instruction according to the needs of their particular students.

Two categories of assessment are formal assessment and informal assessment.

Formal assessment, such as standardized achievement tests or diagnostic tests, can alert teachers to students with reading problems.

However, combining formal assessment with informal assessment – such as observation of reading behaviors in the classroom – often provides a more complete picture of individual reading abilities.

Informal assessment can be as simple as having a student read aloud in a private conference or record a reading on tape.

Readers who read the first few letters of a word and then guess the rest, or fill in words they don't know with incorrect words that fit in context, may not have well-developed decoding skills.

Readers who read too slowly and without expression may not have developed enough fluency for comprehension.

Students who can answer questions when you read aloud to them, but not when they read themselves, may need more decoding and fluency practice.

Others may read fluently, but have not learned to apply comprehension strategies and cannot answer simple questions about what they have just read.

Having students read aloud often can help pinpoint specific reading problems, diagnose reading development issues, and monitor progress toward reading goals.

Tools to use for informal assessment include:

screening assessments, such as ones to assess phonemic awareness;

checklists, such as ones to assess letter/sound correspondences, and scoring guides for writing responses;

"running records" for assessing reading accuracy, analyzing student errors, and establishing reading level and fluency level;

and reading inventories, such as those that determine reading habits.

Assessments should be used more frequently for learners who are struggling and are considered below grade level and less frequently for those achieving at higher levels.

Struggling readers often become disengaged, and refuse to read or attend to reading because of fear of failure. It is simply more comfortable for these students to **not** try, than to try and fail.

Therefore, material used for assessment should be on the student's reading level, and it should be interesting.

Students should take part in the assessment process when possible.

This can be done by helping them set reading goals and by providing them with checklists and rubrics that include a scale of reading progress.

Having students "retell" a passage is a useful tool for assessing comprehension. Students read a passage, and then write a paragraph that summarizes the main points.

Look for summaries that go beyond simple fact recall. Good comprehenders should be able to connect information to other knowledge, provide inferential information, and provide personal meaning to their reading.

Meaningful assessment should improve instruction and learning.

Allowing students to take a role in developing assessment criteria and procedures helps them develop self-assessment skills.

Self-monitoring is an important aspect of good reading comprehension.

Both informal and formal assessments can be used to inform instruction. Different reading tests assess different components of reading at different stages of development.

Teachers and administrators should select tests that complement each other, and which, when combined, provide a complete picture of the reading instruction needs of any student.

We urge you to study the links below for further information on assessment instruments.

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion before moving on to the next seminar.

Section 2f01
Instruction/Intervention/Overview

Learning to read is a developmental process. It begins with phonological awareness – attention to the sounds of our language, learning the names of letters, and then the sounds the letters make.

Students begin to sound out words and build a sight vocabulary. As reading progresses, decoding ability becomes fluent, vocabularies are enriched, and knowledge about the world increases.

Throughout this process of learning to read, figuring out meaning – or, *comprehension* -- is essential.

Comprehension is not something added to the reading process after learning to read words. *From the very beginning,* students should be learning to comprehend different types of text – expository, and narrative, reader-friendly and not so reader friendly.

The more readers read, the better they get.

But what about the poor readers? Some readers are stuck in a stage of reading development and cannot progress to reading proficiency without help.

Reading intervention should occur at every grade level.

The first program in this series, *Learning to Read,* offers detailed information about intervention for grades K through 3.

It is crucial for beginning readers to progress through the early stages before frustration takes over.

The need for literacy intervention does not end there, however. ***Even if*** every struggling beginning reader received appropriate intervention by 3rd grade (and we know this doesn't happen) we would find many students who need help with fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in the intermediate and middle grades.

Some struggling students have little experience with rich literary environments. Some are second language learners. Some just don't read enough to become proficient.

Studies show that at least twenty-five percent of secondary students do not read with basic proficiency.

Effective intervention includes the following considerations:

The first step is to determine what the reading problem is.

Is it a decoding problem? Is it fluency? Is it comprehension? The assessment seminar and links provide information about how to diagnose problems.

Next, intervention should begin at the level in which it is needed. This requires looking for and treating deficits in prerequisite skills.

Assessment should be ongoing.

Carefully choose reading material that is below the frustration level of the student, especially for younger students. Older students may do better with a higher level of difficulty IF the topic is one they find interesting and have plenty of prior knowledge about.

Choose a systematic approach and remain consistent. Often students with the greatest reading difficulty are those who are most transient. Providing district wide, consistent, and thorough assessment and intervention will generate better results.

Section 2f02
Instruction/Intervention/Decoding

In order to recognize printed words, a reader must be able to map speech sounds to letter symbols.

The reader must also be able to recognize letter sequences quickly and accurately.

The reader must have a well-developed understanding of syntax or language structure. Many students who read below the 30th percentile are deficient in these areas.

These skills are taught to younger students through songs, rhyming games, word play, and other age-appropriate means.

Phonological awareness, decoding, and other language skills can be taught to ***older*** students through spelling and linguistics.

Instruction must be begin on the student's appropriate level. It must be systematic and sequential and comprehensive.

At the same time students are learning about phonemic awareness, phoneme-grapheme correspondence, decoding, and syntax, they should be reading literature, using the writing process and receiving effective vocabulary instruction.

Comprehension strategies are also taught simultaneously.

At the very least, providing this type of intervention will require:
An assessment and intervention system, district-wide if possible;

Increased professional development for teachers;

And support materials that use research-based methods to help struggling readers.

Keep in mind that many poor readers suffer psychologically, emotionally and behaviorally due to years of reading and academic failure. The learning environment for these students requires special consideration.

Create a safe learning environment that:

- Is non-threatening,
- Is motivational,
- Is low-stress,
- Features social interaction and collaboration, and,
- Builds on strengths.

Section 2f03
Instruction/Intervention/Fluency

Readers who read too slowly and without expression need more reading practice. Reading comprehension requires a certain level of fluency and automatic word recognition.

If students read very slowly, they are probably missing the meaning of the text. They are concentrating so much on reading words they have little brain power left to understand the text as a whole.

Fluency practice can be fun and challenging.

For instance, a game of quick-reading syllables can increase speed of whole word recognition. Students can time themselves and chart progress on a graph.

Repeated readings of the same text is another technique that can help with fluency. Students read short, meaningful passages several times until a certain level of fluency is achieved.

Students can practice oral reading while listening to the text being read simultaneously.

Or, pair a higher-level reader with a lower-level reader. The pair of students can echo read a book.

The higher-level reader reads first, one sentence at a time, and the lower level reader reads the same text. The fluid, expressive reading of the first reader is imitated by the second reader.

Practice for a performance of reading poetry or prose for an audience also allows for repeated readings of text. Repeated readings of text increase fluency.

Let students record their own reading on audiotapes and then listen to themselves read while reading along. Then they can rerecord to improve their performance.

Again, fluency practice is not a SUBSTITUTION for comprehension instruction. Comprehension instruction should be ongoing as well. Fluency practice, however, may help students move toward higher levels of comprehension ability.

Section 2f04
Instruction/Intervention/Comprehension

Every student benefits from comprehension instruction.

We have established the need in previous seminars for extensive instruction on text structures, vocabulary and language development, and comprehension strategies for all students.

However, some students may be further behind their peers in their reading comprehension levels. If assessment determines that a learner is deficient in comprehension, consider the issues that might be keeping that learner from comprehending.

It could be lack of prior knowledge, weak vocabulary, difficulty staying on task while reading, lack of knowledge about text structures, or a host of other issues that can cause poor comprehension.

We have discussed these in previous seminars. You will find that a combination of several factors usually causes comprehension to suffer.

How can intervention be applied? Simply follow the same methods that are outlined in the previous seminars.

Reading instruction for at-risk learners should share much of the same content with regular instruction. The difference however is that these students will need instruction that is **more explicit, more intensive, and more supportive.**

It is never too late. Older poor readers can learn the foundation language skills and can improve if provided with the time to practice these skills while reading meaningful text.

Effective instruction explicitly teaches the language structure; it matches the developmental level of the student; it addresses deficits in prerequisite skills,

And is systematic, cumulative, consistent and intensive.

Effective reading initiatives include:

- Appropriate and on-going assessment measures,
- An intervention system, and,
- Well-trained and supported teachers.

Section 2f05
Instruction/Intervention/ESL

Students whose native language is not English often have special intervention needs.

Some students may have difficulty comprehending English, but comprehend reading in their native language.

Others have difficulty decoding an alphabetic language.

Those who decode in their native language will have an easier time learning to decode English.

It is important to assess these students to determine their level of reading development.

Systematic vocabulary and language development are crucial components for these students.

The National Research Council recommends students who read in their native language be taught to extend skills to reading English at the same time they are developing their oral English skills.

They recommend younger students, who do not read in their native language, first develop basic proficiency in spoken English.

A rich and varied environment of literacy resources is particularly vital for these readers.

Furthermore, opportunities for social interaction can help struggling second language learners gain linguistic understanding of English.

Teaching high-frequency words will help set up their ability to learn English from context.

When teaching comprehension strategies, pay special attention to places in reading where cultural background differences affect the ability to connect to prior knowledge.

Making inferences also often requires certain familiarity of the English language culture.

Second language learners should be taught strategies to connect what they are reading to their own cultural knowledge so they can retain information.

Please open your reflection journal now for some questions and discussion.