

Reading Comprehension: Start it early and teach it often!

Capstone Experience

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Dear Capstone Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my Capstone on reading comprehension. I have been asked to provide you with this cover letter since the following Capstone is different than what was described in my original proposal.

My original proposal said that I was going to design a six hour inservice with the goal of teaching kindergarten teachers the importance of teaching reading comprehension to their young students. I have kept the same topic but rather than teaching teachers, I have created lesson plans that I could use to directly teach the students. This seemed as if it would be much more useful to me as a teacher in the long run. I hope this change does not cause any problems. Thank you in advance for your time and insights.

Sincerely,

Hillary Green

Abstract

Comprehension is the ultimate purpose for reading and is the key to reading success. Research has shown that children as young as five years old can be taught comprehension strategies and implement these strategies when they read. Yet the vast majority of school systems delay comprehension instruction until teachers and/or administrators perceive that students have successfully mastered decoding. This often delays the beginning of comprehension instruction until the third or fourth grade. Unfortunately, this instructional delay results in missed opportunities as unguided students are very likely to experience at least some degree of reading failure and manifest potentially dysfunctional reading related behaviors to mask their lack of skills. Even without early structured instruction in comprehension strategies, most students do develop some abilities to comprehend textbooks and other reading materials. However they will still manifest limitations in the depth of their comprehension and they will have little or no metacognitive awareness of the strategies they are using to understand what they are reading. As discussed in detail in the research section of this paper, there are many different programs that provide instructional methods for teaching reading comprehension in the primary grades. One such methodology/curriculum, called the Comprehension Process Approach (CPA), is the focus of this paper and the basis for the lesson plans included as part of this Capstone Project. The rationale for selecting CPA is that it is designed specifically for use in kindergarten through the third grade. As noted earlier, this is an age range most other comprehension programs do not even mention despite the evidence that early comprehension teaching can optimize a student's potential for lifelong reading success.

Literature Review

“There is not an isolated skill developed in early childhood that leads to later successful reading comprehension, but rather a strong, broad, multifaceted early literacy foundation that is built and eventually used by the reader for the purpose of constructing comprehension of a text. Children who are ultimately [the] most likely to be successful comprehenders of reading are those who acquire the strongest literacy foundations during the early childhood years” (Tracey & Morrow, 2002, p.220). Reading comprehension instruction often begins in the third grade. It is at this point that teachers feel that students have developed strong enough reading abilities that they can begin to focus on an aspect of reading that does not deal directly with decoding. All too often teachers assume that a limited decoding ability equals limited ability to think deeply about texts (Ivey, 2002, p.237). Andie Cunningham and Ruth Shagoury (2005) argue that it is never too early to start comprehension instruction. They found that it is “essential to begin with meaning when we start formal reading instruction. Otherwise, the earliest, most crucial introductions to literacy have little or no connection to students’ lives” (p.6). Most materials we find today for the younger grades are “often limited to: (1) integrated studies on a variety of topics, (2) phonics lessons, (3) phonemic awareness exercises, [and/or] (4) thematic arts and crafts activities. Materials that build young children’s higher-order thinking skills and reading comprehension are rare” (Block, Rodgers, & Johnson, 2004, p. xi). However, “it is clear that children who cannot comprehend tend to fall further behind their peers [in their comprehension abilities] by third grade, regardless of their decoding skill level” (Chall, 1998, p.98 quoted in Block et al., 2004, p. 4). Recent research has proved that children as young as age 5 have the ability to evaluate their own

comprehension; however, most students will not engage such metacognitions without instruction (Baker, 2002; Block, 1998; Paris et al., 1991 quoted in Block et al., 2004, p. 4). This metacognitive skill positively increases their motivational drive, interest, and reading pleasure (Borkowski, Carr, Rellinger, & Pressley, 1990; Hacker, 1998; Paris & Winograd, 1990 quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.148).

In 2000 the National Reading Panel issued a statement regarding the early instruction of reading comprehension skills. Firstly, they defined reading comprehension as an “active process, directed by intentional thinking that allows young readers to make connections between their thinking processes, the textual content, and their own knowledge, expectations, and purposes for reading” (National Reading Panel [NRP] quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.3). They went on to say that “the goal of comprehension instruction in grades K-3 is to build readers’ thinking processes so that they can read a text with understanding, construct memory and metacognitive representations of what they understand and put their new understandings to use when communicating with others” (NRP quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.3). Additionally, the National Reading Panel found that “meaning resides in the intentional, problem-solving, thinking processes of the reader as that reader participates in an interchange with the text. This meaning-making process is influenced by the text, and by the reader’s prior knowledge that is brought to bear on it by the reader” (NRP quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.3). While “it has been proven that strategy instruction is more effective than isolated drill and practice on separate skills,” (Guthrie et al., 2000 quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.6) data suggest that it is not simply explicit instruction, but rather the teachers’ abilities to communicate to the student the thinking processes involved that significantly increase pupils’ comprehension

(Block, 2001c; Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002; Block and Pressley, 2002, quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.6). When teachers teach the thinking processes involved in reading comprehension, or any other skill, they “increase students’ involvement in and control over the meaning-making endeavor” (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Palincsar, 1986; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976 quoted in Block et al., 2004, p.6) through the various demonstrations used and the teacher-student conversations that result.

Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words, but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading. To comprehend is not to simply absorb the author’s meanings. “Comprehending is an active process of using everything we know to construct a meaningful text, and filtering what has been written through our own knowledge and experiences”(Owocki, 2003, p.3). The term active process is of critical importance when thinking about reading comprehension. Mature readers approach a text cognizant of their background knowledge and previous experiences with the topic at hand. They use all kinds of knowledge and strategies to make sense of what the author has to say. They ask themselves questions. They pause to think. They create mental pictures (Owocki, 2003). Since the experienced reader brings mental images, vocabulary and background knowledge to the text when attempting to construct meaning, it is imperative to consider the student’s content knowledge as you are evaluating the child’s comprehension. Text containing content with which the child is familiar will be easier for the child to read, discuss, retell, and remember; skills often associated with good comprehension. It is critical to remember that the capabilities of a reader always relate to the particular text. It is rare to find a student who is a good reader of all text types. However, there are good readers of science fiction, good readers of

science text, and good third grade readers. It is the interaction of the reader and the text that determines whether the student will be less or more successful in comprehending the material at hand (Snow & Sweet, 2003). The mature reader is aware of the presence of a problem with understanding and how to resolve these problems when they occur (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Comprehension strategies are conscious plans that help mature readers make sense of the text. Instruction of these strategies helps students to become purposeful, active readers, who are in control of their own reading comprehension. When providing explicit instruction for these strategies, “teachers tell readers why and when they should use strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them” (Armbruster et al., 2001, p. 53). Reading comprehension is a gradual process which matures over time. Reading comprehension instruction in the primary grades helps to build a foundation for future instruction. Teachers would do well to emphasize text comprehension from the beginning, thus showing students how reading is a process of making sense out of text and constructing meaning. Beginning readers, as well as more advanced readers, must understand that the ultimate goal of reading is comprehension (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Block and Pressley (2007) recommend that instruction in how to predict, make connections, and summarize, ought to begin in kindergarten. There should be a high number of read-alouds. With every read-aloud there should be a teacher led think-aloud which can model how to use multiple comprehension processes. During these think-alouds, with both fiction and non-fiction texts, the teacher should “make predictions, talk about images that come to mind, formulate questions and notice when the questions are answered later in the text, seek clarification if something is confusing, [provide

definitions for unfamiliar words, and] make connections, and summarize” (p.229). In kindergarten and first grade students should begin to use comprehension strategies. The goal is to have the children automatize three to five comprehension processes and use them continuously, metacognitively, without teacher prompting, by the end of the year. During every lesson, encourage students to use the actual name of these strategies and processes when they report to you what they are doing, but also encourage your students to tell you why they are using a particular strategy or process. Guide the students to be able to tell you the questions they are asking themselves and the connections they are making. They should let you know what they are finding confusing and how they are attempting to clarify the confusion. They should give you a summary of the text rather than just telling you that they are summarizing (Block & Pressley, 2007). “By teaching students how to use more than one comprehension process in a single lesson, students may be shown how to view their comprehension and metacomprehension as a unified self-controlled activity” (Block, 2004 quoted in Block & Pressley, 2007, p. 230).

Research has shown that even kindergarten students can use multiple strategies after one week of instruction. These kindergarten students “show significantly higher achievement than control groups in predicting, identifying [the] main ideas, knowing how much they have learned from their teacher’s instruction, identifying the author’s purpose, internalizing comprehension processes, and using non-fiction textual features” (Block, 2005a; Block, Rodgers, & Johnson, 2004; Cummings, Stewart, & Block, 2005; Stewart, 2004 quoted in Block & Pressley, 2007, p. 230).

Comprehension instruction in the primary grade classrooms should not be an isolated curricular bullet. Rather, “instruction should be embedded in both the reading of

storybooks and in guided reading lessons” (Pearson & Duke, 2002, p.252). Several studies demonstrate that comprehension development can be fostered not only by explicit instruction, but also by consistently embedding particular kinds of literacy activities in the reading of classroom texts. Appropriate instruction in comprehension strategies and processes will foster both short-term and long-term success, comprehension of the current text and comprehension capacities in general. Effective teachers incorporate both goals into their comprehension instruction. “They have a clear understanding of which students need which type of instruction for which texts, and they give students the instruction they need to meet both short-term and long-term comprehension goals” (Snow & Sweet, 2003, p.5).

The Comprehension Process Approach is one curriculum that is designed to be embedded in the current curriculum used for kindergarten through third grade students. This approach has goals and implications for the teachers and students alike. The Comprehension Process Approach “puts students’ cognitive processes at the center of the teaching process” (Block, 1999 in Block, 2004, p.2). The Comprehension Process Approach (CPA) contains “print-rich, developmentally appropriate lessons, and actively engages students to initiate their own thinking processes to untangle the confusions and complexities in printed ideas” (Block, 2004, p.3). The lessons allow teachers to aptly explain to their students how comprehension develops; in other words, how students and authors “work artistically together to build understanding” (Block, 1999; Leslie & Allen, 1999; Lipson & Wixson, 1997 quoted in Block, 2004, p.3). The comprehension process lessons “value equally (1) individual interpretation and literal comprehension, (2) avid reading of fiction as well as nonfiction, (3) student reflection as well as direct instruction,

and (4) both efferent and aesthetic responses to reading” (Block, 2004, p.3). The Comprehension Process Approach divides instruction into three strands: “(1) teaching students how to combine multiple thinking processes, (2) encouraging students to enjoy reading, and (3) increasing students’ abilities to recognize their own comprehension weaknesses” (Block, 2004, p.3). “In CPA lessons, the making of meaning is taught as a process [,] in which complex thoughts and comprehension tools are engaged when a text requires them,” (Block, 2004, p.5) as opposed to teachers simply delivering procedural information to students prior to reading. CPA calls for a balance between direct instruction and allowing students to have independence. The claim is that too much direct instruction may limit the student’s self-initiated desire to read as well as cause the student to rely overly on rote memorization, because all of the lessons follow the same patterns. In addition, too much direct instruction can result in the student thinking that the teacher is all-knowing and decrease the student’s self-sufficiency. However, if teachers provide too little comprehension instruction and allow for too much independence, they may reduce the reader’s ability to transfer comprehension knowledge to different texts. In addition, without the expert guidance from a teacher, students can not learn how to use several comprehension processes simultaneously. This learning deficit is due to the fact that these students will not have knowledge of a wide range of strategies, and thus will have limited methodologies from which to choose when a breakdown in comprehension arises (Block, 2004).

CPA not only has goals for individual students and the curriculum as a whole, but it also lays out specific goals for teachers. Five goals comprise this methodology in its entirety. The first goal deals with scaffolding students’ instruction and providing the

student with opportunities to have a choice in determining which comprehension processes are discussed. Scaffolding can occur through demonstrations prior to reading of a text, having students discuss with each other the processes they are using to comprehend while they are reading, or by prompting the student by providing the name of the process that would be helpful for a specific point in the text.

The second goal for teachers deals with teacher-student conferences. The teacher should aim to omit teacher dominated conferences and replace them with student-dominated “discovery discussions” (Block, 2004, p.10). During these discovery discussions, students talk to their teacher about “how they improved their reading abilities, [which strategies] they depend on to read well, and what they need to comprehend better” (Block, 2004, p.10). The purpose of these discussions is to discover something that is blocking the student’s comprehension. These discussions are designed to increase the level of effort and energy the students are willing to put forth in order to become better readers.

The third goal for teachers is to avoid simply giving directions and rather guide the students in previewing the text. Once students have learned how to preview a text, they will gradually begin to preview textual features without prompting. This previewing of the text allows students to activate their prior knowledge, facilitating a more complete comprehension of the text.

The fourth goal for teachers is “leading students to initiate rather than merely contribute” (Block, 2004, p.16). Commend your students when they successfully use a comprehension process without your prompting. Additionally, you could add something to the ideas the students expressed or you could surprise them with a concrete object that

relates to the comment they made. Such gratifying feedback and surprises will show the students how much you value their self-initiated comprehension.

The fifth and final goal deals with the type of questions teachers ask. It is important to ask those questions that have multiple correct answers, not found directly in the text, but rather, those answers that require the students to think about and elaborate on the content of the text. These “respondent-centered questions enable students to: (1) explain details, sequence, main ideas, and themes; (2) generate problem-solving sequences; (3) assimilate dissimilar events into their own lives; (4) express affective responses and insights; and, (5) justify and defend their positions” (Block, 2004, p.18).

A teacher is charged with the difficult task of instructing all her students, regardless of their different learning styles and ability levels. The teacher must “create daily, effective activities that serve the multiple intelligences, varied personalities, and literacy needs” (Block, 2004, p.29) of all her students. The lessons in the Comprehension Process Approach teach students how to: “(1) engage multiple meaning making processes (strand 1); (2) come to appreciate reading and grow as human beings in the course of reading comprehension instruction (strand 2); and, (3) diagnose their comprehension weaknesses (strand 3)” (Block, 2004, p. 29). All students do not learn in the same manner, and, therefore, one method of instruction cannot lead to comprehension for all students. Rather teachers must “differentiate the goals and formats of their comprehension instruction” (Block, 2004, p.29).

“Strand one lessons teach comprehension processes before the students experience confusion. The goal of [these] lessons is to teach how to make meaning through the use of more than one comprehension process through stories that teacher tell

about how they, and other readers, process text” (Block, 2004, p.31). During strand 1 lessons, teachers also explain how “to use the teacher-within (students’ metacognitions, prior experiences, and personal goals) and the teachers-without (peers, teachers, textual clues, and other print, visual, or oral media tools) when lack of prior knowledge about the subject matter creates comprehension difficulties” (Cain-Thoreson, Lippman, & McClendon-Magnuson, 1997; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995 quoted in Block, 2004, p.31). An important aspect of strand one lessons is the type of questions the teacher asks. It is common for a teacher to ask her students, “What did you like about this selection?” A student will be able to answer this question regardless of whether or not she comprehended the text. In contrast, if a teacher asks either, (1) ‘How did [insert process being studied] help you to overcome confusion in the text?’ or (2) ‘How did [insert process] help you as you read?’ these questions require the student to be aware of the processes they used in facilitating their understanding of the text. These questions cannot be answered unless the student comprehended what was read. Strand one lessons “do not let students struggle alone, but rather [they] teach processes before a reading selection stumps and[/or] frustrates them” (Block, 2004, p.35).

Strand two lessons provide children with generous periods of uninterrupted time to interact with books. Before beginning a strand two lesson, the student must select “how, what, and where she will read, as well as how her reading will contribute to the themes in classroom topics under study” (Block, 2004, p.36). Strand two lessons are a time for students to relax and read. It is during strand two instruction that the teacher scaffolds each student’s learning individually, so that the student can understand deep, broad concepts at the point where they occur in the text or where their interests are

piqued due to prior knowledge. During this silent reading time, students are encouraged to stop and ask questions as they are reading. Teachers, therefore, have to play an active role and come to the students' aid when comprehension breaks down. The teacher should then answer the student's question as simply and as quickly as possible and should refrain from reteaching the comprehension process in depth. The goal is to avoid interrupting the student's silent reading time to the greatest extent possible. After a teacher helps the student, the teacher can make a note about which processes need further instruction in future strand one lessons. Strand two lessons encourage students to read good books and take risks due to the fact that they have a more experienced adult reader there to help them if assistance is needed. Additionally, with strand two lessons beginning with the setting of goals for reading, students learn how to establish their own purposes for reading and to turn to books to learn more about topics in which they are interested (Block, 2004). Strand two lessons increase the number of questions students ask about the text which ultimately increases and expands their reading comprehension abilities.

The goal of strand three lessons is to have the students identify their own strengths and weaknesses and to increase their desire and drive to solve the problems they face in their own reading abilities. Such self-awareness of comprehension abilities is critical, because only the students themselves are aware of the level of effort that they are willing to put forth in order to become better readers. Strand three lessons allow students to choose what they want to learn about the reading process as opposed to simply choosing what they want to read. Students with similar interests can be grouped together for small group instruction. Strand three lessons aim to increase the level of effort the student is willing to put forth in order to become a better reader. When taught following

strand one and strand two lessons, strand three lessons teach the students how to “think strategically and apply processes appropriately” (Block, 2004, p.40).

Finally, the Comprehension Process Approach also lays out student responsibilities. The students need to be active participants in their quest to learn new comprehension process and become better comprehenders. When students are “mentally active (on a metacognitive level), [they] no longer view themselves as objects to be scripted, or as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. They become mature individualistic sculptors, chiseling their personal meaning onto their own mental states” (Block, 2004, p.49). Teachers need to communicate to students that their opinions and interpretations are valued in the classroom. Since each child has a different background knowledge set, each interpretation will provide new insights. Teachers can provide students with many different avenues to have their opinions and voices heard. Another way to help students know that their voice is valued in the classroom is to provide them with choices regarding what they read. Allowing the students to choose their own texts avoids the common problem of too much teacher imposed direction. “If teachers insist on doing all of the thinking for [their]students and if [the students] interpret this as meaning that everything has to be done according to the teacher’s way, then what have [teachers] left for [the] students to turn to with pride concerning their own comprehension” (Block, 2004, p.53)?

Whether you teach comprehension processes and strategies to your students through the Comprehension Process Approach or through a different method, it is clear that comprehension instruction is critical in the elementary grades. Research has shown, and the National Reading Panel has confirmed, that students who receive instruction in

multiple comprehension processes and strategies outperform their peers on standardized measures testing comprehension. The National Reading Panel has also confirmed that it is important to start instruction in comprehension early. It has become evident that students as young as five years of age can understand their metacognitive processes when taught to do so correctly. This means that comprehension instruction should begin as early as kindergarten and should be taught simultaneously with decoding skills. Students, at the earliest levels of the reading process, need to learn that the point of reading is to comprehend. Without comprehension there is no joy in what becomes a meaningless reading process. Finally, comprehension instruction is an ongoing process as opposed to a single, one time intervention. Teachers at all levels need to teach comprehension processes, especially when they are teaching a subject area. There are different processes and strategies for comprehending different kinds of texts and students cannot be expected to draw from various strategies if they have not received instruction on their use and value.

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Lesson Plan-Day 1

Introduction to Metacognition

Objectives:

- The students will be introduced to new vocabulary
- The students will begin to understand the process of metacognition

Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

- The Day The Teacher Went Bananas book by James Howe
- Metacognition poster
- Markers and chart paper

Procedures:

- Bring the students to the carpet to join in a read-aloud
- tell the students that we will be reading a book called The Day The Teacher Went Bananas
- Explain that there will probably be some words in the story that they are not familiar with and that I want them to be sure to raise their hands and ask if we come across a word that they don't understand. I am anticipating that they won't know the word 'arithmetic'. They might be unfamiliar with the word 'science'.
- If no one asks about the vocabulary I will prompt them by asking about specific vocabulary
- Once we finish the book we will have a conversation about metacognition—tell them that I am going to teach them a new word and this might be a word that their parents don't even know
- Ask them first if anyone has ever heard the word metacognition or if they have any guesses about what it might mean—write their guesses with their name on chart paper. I do not anticipate anyone knowing what the word

means but this allows them to be active in the process rather than just being told information.

- After several guesses about the meaning of metacognition tell the students that you will give them a hint about the meaning—X student (whichever one said that he or she didn't understand a word or a thought) was showing us an example of metacognition
- present the students with the poster that says “Metacognition: Thinking about our own thinking” and explain that when X student said she didn't understand what a word meant she was thinking about what her brain was thinking about because she knew that her brain didn't understand that word
- Explain that thinking about our own thinking is a confusing idea and something that we are going to be practicing all year. Tell them that once we have learned how to know when our brain is confused or doesn't understand something reading is going to be a lot easier and a lot more fun!
- Let the students know that I am going to hang the poster somewhere in the room where we can look at it and remember that metacognition is thinking about our own thinking
- Have them say the word and the definition with me a final time.
- Practice some metacognition with them. I will ask the students “if I were in your brain right now what would I hear?” The students will respond with “if you were in my brain right now you would hear...” Tell them this is what they are thinking about right now. So if they are thinking about lunch they can tell me that is what I would hear their brain thinking about or if they are excited about recess or a play date that is what they would tell me about. This is just a way to practice having the students be in tune with the processing going on in their brains

Assessment:

- By the end of the lesson were the students able to tell me the word metacognition and what it means
- Were the students able to identify words they didn't understand without prompting

Lesson Plan – Day 2
Revisiting Metacognition

Objectives:

- The students will show me their knowledge of metacognition by remembering the word and being able to tell me what it means
- The students will be learn what it looks like and sounds like to think about their thinking while reading a text
- The students will demonstrate their thinking through an artistic product

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Materials:

- Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna
- Metacognition poster
- Art supplies for students (markers, colored pencils, crayons)
- 12x18 white construction paper for student pictures

Procedures:

- Bring the students to the carpet
- Ask them if anyone can remember the new vocabulary word that we learned yesterday. I anticipate that someone will remember but if not I can give clues to try to help them remember
- Once they name metacognition ask if anyone can remember what it means. Again, if no one remembers prompt them to remember where they can look and see the poster
- Tell the students that we are going to read a story called Mr. Peabody's Apples. Let them know that throughout the story I am going to show them what it looks like to think about what your brain is thinking.
- Read the story
- Throughout the book stop when I am surprised about something, want to make a prediction, have a connection, etc. Bring the book to my chest and say to the students “if you were in my brain right now you would hear that I am surprised about...” or “if you were in my brain right now you would hear that

I am predicting that..." or finally, "if you were in my brain right now you would hear that I am making a connection to the time that I ..."

- Give the students a chance to show their thinking by asking them what prediction I would hear if I were in their brains right now. This question would come after I had already demonstrated making a prediction. At the end of hearing several of their predictions, make sure to say "let's keep reading to find out" so as to give our read-aloud a further purpose
- After the story is finished tell the students that now that they have heard my thinking and the thinking of some of their peers, I want to see their thinking. Let them know that I am going to give each one of them a piece of paper and that I want them to show me their thinking. They can use whatever tools are at their tables and they can show me a connection they had to the text, a prediction they made and if it came true, something that surprised them, or maybe something that they are still confused about. Let them know that I would like them to try to write some words explaining their picture if they can but I will be coming around to write the words for them if they don't feel comfortable. Tell the students that I will be giving them about 20 minutes to work on their pictures.
- As I go around to be the scribe, be sure to ask the students what process they are using and why. In other words, if they are showing a prediction, have them tell me what they are predicting and why they think it will happen. Or if they are confused about something have them tell me what they are confused about and how they could clarify their confusion

Assessment:

- Were the students able to remember the word metacognition and tell me what it meant?
- Were the students able to tell me what predictions their brains were making while reading the text?
- Did the students create pictures that were relevant to the story? Did their connections make sense? If they were unsure about a part was it a part in the story?

Lesson Plan-Day 3
Metacognition and Nonfiction

Objectives:

- The students will demonstrate their metacognition by using their fingers to show if they understand each page of text
- The students will continue to practice metacognition
- The students will attempt to identify what part confused them rather than just saying they are confused
- The students will learn about a new type of text called nonfiction

Time: 60 minutes

Materials:

- The Pledge of Allegiance – a book put out by scholastic
- Metacognition poster
- Chart paper and marker

Procedures:

- Bring the students to the carpet
- Tell the students that we are going to learn about a new type of text today. Ask them if anyone has heard of nonfiction. I expect that several students will raise their hands. Call on a few students and ask if they can tell me about nonfiction books. I am looking to hear answers along the lines of the text is made up of facts, it is true, some students might know that often times the pictures are photographs instead of drawings, and that sometimes there are labels in the pictures. I will write their suggestions down on a chart so that we can follow up on what they said
- Following this discussion, we will take a picture walk through the text to see if we can find the things that they talked about. I will tell them that nonfiction

texts are true and that they are composed of facts. We can find other features of nonfiction texts as we look through the book

- After our picture walk tell the students that we are going to use this nonfiction book to practice our metacognition skills.
- Again ask students to tell me what metacognition means. I am hoping at this point that I can get a whole class response and students will not need to refer to the poster
- Tell the students that during this reading I am going to ask them to hold up one finger if they understand what the page said and hold up two fingers if they are confused
- We are going to practice before the reading of the text because this is a new concept for them. First I will say a sentence in English and then ask the students to hold up 1 or 2 fingers. Then I will say a sentence in Spanish. Although all the students are taking Spanish some may understand and some may not. I will again ask them to repeat the process of holding up 1 or 2 fingers. If anyone holds up 2 fingers signifying that they didn't understand, I will ask them to tell me what part they didn't understand. This may not be something the child can identify at this point with their current level of practice so if they struggle I might ask them if there were any words they did recognize. Next I will ask a student to come up and count to 10 in Chinese. There are 4 students in the class who are taking Chinese as part of an after school program. Again, the 1 or 2 fingers. Finally I will end the practice with a sentence in English but one that has some vocabulary that they are likely to be unfamiliar with.
- Following the practice we will discuss that even when the sentences were in English there were words we didn't understand and that might happen while I am reading this text.
- Remind the students that they need to listen carefully because at the end of each page I am going to pause and ask them to hold up 1 finger if they understood everything on the page and to hold up 2 fingers if there was something they were confused about

- Read the text! Stop at the end of each page and have the students hold up their fingers. If any students hold up 2 fingers ask them to tell me what part they didn't understand.
- End the lesson with a game about nonfiction texts. Tell the students that I will be saying a sentence and they have to stand up if it is true about nonfiction texts and to stay seated if it is not true.

Assessment:

- Were the students able to monitor their own comprehension by holding up one or two fingers
- Were the students able to identify what part they were confused about if they held up two fingers
- Were the students able to play the game at the end of the lesson and correctly identify the components of a nonfiction text

Lesson Plan-Day 4

ASL/ CPI Signs for Comprehension Processes

Objectives:

- The students will learn signs for several comprehension processes
- The students will use signs to demonstrate which comprehension process they are using
- The students will continue to work with the idea of metacognition

Time: 60 minutes

Materials:

- Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna
- Comprehension Process Instruction sign language pictures

Procedures:

- Bring the students to the carpet
- Tell the students that we are going to learn a new way to show if we understand the text. Remind them that yesterday we used one finger or two fingers to show whether you understood or if you were confused. Today we are going to learn signs that you can use to show which comprehension processes you are using to help yourself comprehend the text.
- The signs we are going to learn are:
 - o asking questions or unsure of something (closed fist pointer finger to right side of forehead)
 - o making connections (thumb and pointer finger of both hands in interlocking circles)
 - o making predictions (pointer and middle fingers up and other fingers folded as in peace sign...right hand starts with finger tips in position by eyes, left arm extended horizontally across chest, right hand makes downward sweeping motion and curves up, wrist meet wrist and left hand rests on right arm)

- Show the students the posters with the signs on them so that they can have a visual reminder of each sign
- Be sure to talk about when you would use each sign. If you are confused about something or you are trying to get more information, you would show the sign for asking questions. If you are making a prediction you would show the sign for predictions. If you are making a connection with another story or something that you have done before show the making connections sign.
- Let the students know that we are going to play a game called show me. In this game I am going to tell them the process and they are going to have to show me the sign. Once I feel that the students have mastered the signs I will end the game by telling them to “show me” sitting on the carpet ready to listen to a story
- Tell the students that we are going to read Mr. Peabody’s Apples for a second time. Let them know that during the reading I expect them to use the signs that we have learned to show me what comprehension processes they are using. Remind them that they can either use the signs we just practiced or if they are confused about something or don’t understand they can show me by holding up two fingers.
- Let them know that I will be watching to see what processes they are using and there is no right or wrong answer at any time. There are many different ways to make sense of something and it is possible that each person in the room could be using a different process in the same sentence of text. It is all about which process works the best for them.
- Read the story! Pay attention to the signs they are using. If at any point during the story someone holds up two fingers, try to stop and ask them what part they are confused about and see how they think they might find the answer. It might be as easy as to keep reading to find out or they might need some additional information. Be sure to ask the student to tell you what part they are confused about rather than just that they are confused
- Finish the lesson by asking the students what they noticed about using the signs. This might be a hard concept for them although we have talked about

what we notice before. If they seem confused prompt them by asking if they noticed if using the signs helped them to think about their thinking or helped them to pay attention to their thinking and the story.

Assessment:

- Were the students able to learn the signs and use them when prompted
- Did the students use the signs to indicate which comprehension processes they were using
- Did the students use the signs appropriately? In other words, was it a place in the text that lent itself to predictions?
- Do the students feel that showing the signs helped them to be more in tune with their thought processes

Rationale for Lesson Plans

The preceding lesson plans are intended to be used as an introductory program of metacognition for kindergarten students. The lesson plans were adapted from those that Andie Cunningham used with her kindergarten students, which she later published in Starting with Comprehension: Reading Strategies for the Youngest Learners. The lessons provide a systematic stepwise approach to teaching a skills set for addressing diverse capacities for developing reading comprehension. The entire concept of emphasizing comprehension in kindergarten and the possibility of engaging five year olds in self needs assessment is remarkably innovative. Methodology is rooted in the belief that kindergarteners are far more capable than we previously believed and that their future reading success depends on having a genuine partnership in learning. You will notice that each lesson begins by bringing the students to the carpet. This activity serves a dual purpose. First, it is much easier for everyone to see the text and hear the teacher, as well as one another, when seated together on the carpet. Second, when the class is physically close in a learning environment, it helps to create community spirit. This feeling of community helps students to feel emotionally secure in the classroom, making them more willing to step outside their comfort zone to take risks. In kindergarten, taking a risk may be as simple as being willing to share your ideas in front of your teacher and classmates.

When learning a foreign language, students are unable to communicate unless they are provided with the necessary vocabulary and conversational rules. The same holds true for reading comprehension. Students cannot be expected to comprehend what they are reading, and more importantly discuss their comprehension processes, without being provided the appropriate vocabulary. Lesson one, an introduction to

metacognition, is designed to provide the students with the vocabulary they need, the term metacognition and its definition, which is in kindergarten parlance the process of talking about what you are thinking about. Although the concept of metacognition is a tricky one, and one that many people would consider to be too advanced for kindergarten students, research has demonstrated that when properly presented they can grasp the concept. Kindergarten students come to school eager to learn, thirsty for knowledge and when provided with appropriate instruction they blossom. If the students are made aware of the concept of metacognition they are likely to tune in more to their own thinking. They will be more aware when their thinking is confused and when a breakdown in comprehension has occurred. By having the students participate in defining the meaning of the word metacognition and by providing the class examples of metacognition, they are playing an active role in their own learning. Since the students have taken an active role, they are much more likely to remember what the word means as opposed to if it had been introduced at the start of the lesson as merely another new vocabulary word. Through reading the story and then having a discussion about when someone didn't understand a particular word, the students are seeing metacognition in action. This lesson is designed to lay the foundation for future lessons in metacognition. Because lesson 1 is not very active, the students' attention spans must be monitored. The lesson should ideally last for about 30 minutes and end with practice metacognitive exercises. However, if the students show signs of impatience, this part of the lesson may be deleted. Thirty minutes is a long time for kindergarteners to spend sitting on the carpet in the beginning of the school year.

Lesson two is designed to be a strand 1 lesson, or instruction before the point of need. In this lesson, students learn what it looks like and sounds like to be in tune with their own thinking while reading a text. “When educators teach thinking processes, they increase students’ involvement in and control over the meaning-making endeavor” (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Palincsar, 1986; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1967 quoted in Block, Rodgers, & Johnson, 2004, p.6). Although the students are not yet reading the texts themselves, they still have to comprehend the text by using listening comprehension skills. The processes associated with listening comprehension are the same as those associated with reading comprehension. Again, students cannot be expected to use comprehension processes without first being taught the various processes and when they should be used. In this lesson, a read-aloud and think-aloud are employed to model for the students the processes used to comprehend the text. By using the phrase “if you were in my brain right now...” extra attention is drawn to the activity of metacognition. Many times during a read-aloud teachers model the processes they are using, but do not make explicit the idea that this is what their brain is engaged in thinking about while reading the text. Since kindergarten students are very young and the concept of metacognition is a difficult one, it is important to make instruction as explicit as possible. It is also important to provide the students with a variety of methods to demonstrate their thinking. Some kindergarten students may not yet be ready to verbalize their thought processes, but are able to express what they are thinking through artwork. Providing students with a several options for demonstrating their knowledge is important in all grades, but especially with younger students. By having the students create a picture depicting something that surprised them, a connection they had with the text, a place where they

might be confused, or a prediction they made, it is easier to assess their comprehension and eliminate the need to communicate using their words alone (Cunningham & Shagoury, 2005). Having the students talk about their pictures helps to determine the extent of their comprehension. At this point, any picture that is relevant to the text or deals with something that happened in the text confirms that they correctly understood what was being read. Block and Pressley (2007) state that it is essential to prompt the student to not only tell you what process she is using, but why she is using that process. If the child is depicting a prediction, it is important to ask that child not only what she is predicting, but why she thinks that is a valid prediction. Or, if the child depicts confusion, one must prompt the child to tell how she would find clarity. If the art product is completely unrelated to the text, the student has demonstrated that either she did not understand the task assigned or she did not comprehend the story. Either way, that student has been identified as being in need of additional practice in the art of metacognition.

Lesson three has a two fold purpose. First, the students will be introduced to non-fiction texts. It is very likely that they have never seen a non-fiction text and it is just as important to teach comprehension processes with non-fiction as it is with fiction. Second, the students are again practicing their metacognitive skills through active and physical monitoring methods. During this lesson it is important to ask the students to be very purposeful in thinking about their comprehension. This teacher prompting technique encourages students to assess their understanding at the end of each page rather than waiting for the recognition that a breakdown has occurred. The skill of assessing comprehension is a difficult one and some of the students may not be quite up to it.

However, the hope is that after focusing on metacognition and three consecutive days of practice thinking about their thinking students are beginning to be able to identify a potential breakdown as well as the point at which it occurred. In this way, the students are being asked to monitor their own comprehension in manageable increments. Not only is this helpful for students who are learning to think about their own comprehension processes, but it is a strategy that is helpful for students who are struggling with comprehension in general. Andie Cunningham and Ruth Shagoury (2005) tell us that being able to know that a breakdown in comprehension has occurred and then going farther to identify where exactly the breakdown began is a critical reading skill for children and adults alike. This lesson again gets the students actively involved in monitoring their own thinking and comprehension. Because each student is asked to monitor their comprehension at the conclusion of each page, students are forced to pay attention and are not able to allow their attention to focus elsewhere. Additionally, this active process is one that students can use later while monitoring their own reading comprehension. By asking students to indicate with one finger or two their level of comprehension, the teacher has concrete evidence regarding who understands the process of metacognition and who has already advanced to being able to monitor their own thinking. Asking students what piece they did not understand followed by corrective instruction, takes the lesson to a strand two level. While it is likely that some students are not yet able to monitor their comprehension, inappropriately reporting that they understand and providing the teacher with a false positive, it is still possible to get a general idea of the various comprehension levels in the class. Even the students who report that they do not understand something are revealing a high level of metacognitive understanding. The

last piece of this lesson allows for assessment of the students' understanding of non-fiction texts. While the main goal of the lesson was that of metacognitive practice, the secondary goal of teaching the students about non-fiction is to introduce them to a type of text that they will frequently encounter as they progress in school. Non-fiction texts will be revisited many times during the school year, providing students with opportunities to stretch themselves intellectually. The addition of a total body movement response as an appropriate means for demonstrating knowledge of non-fiction texts is fun for students and provides teachers with real time assessment of students' knowledge.

Lesson four is designed to be a time for students to practice the comprehension processes they have learned. Comprehension is an active process. Students have to work to attain comprehension of a text, regardless of reading ability. Asking students to use physical signs associated with their thinking processes keeps them actively involved and provides an additional means of assessment. Spot checking students regarding their process choice presents an opportunity to probe more deeply into their thinking. If a student reports that she is predicting for something, she can be encouraged to share her thinking with the class. Additionally, Block (2004) tells us that by allowing the students to graphically depict their thinking processes, they are learning to "picture how to direct their own thinking processes" (p.43). The Comprehension Process Instruction approach provides graphic depictions of several of the comprehension processes that they suggest using. Having these pictures on display in the room gives students a visual representation of the various strategies as well as providing a prompt for the students if there is a break down in their comprehension.

The students are now charged with the task of using the comprehension processes they have been taught. For now we are focusing on using the comprehension processes during read-alouds. However, these processes will eventually transfer to reading comprehension as the students become more able to read texts on their own. Students should know that any point during a read-aloud, for the rest of the year, they can either use the one or two finger strategy or the ASL signs to designate their metacognitive processes. Encouraging students to use hand signals improves real time monitoring of student abilities.

It is important to continually reevaluate the successfulness of these teaching practices and analyze any changes that might be made. As a wise teacher once said, “Even the best parents have two year olds who have temper tantrums and even the best teachers have lessons that bomb.” While one never goes into a lesson expecting it to fail, it is important to reflect back on the lessons to look and see what areas might be improved or tweaked to increase student learning or engagement. It is easy to skip over this step when you are tired at the end of the day and still have to grade the papers of 20 students. However, this reflective piece is critical and is the only way for a teacher to continue to grow and develop professionally. Following these lessons on metacognition there are several questions to address. First, is the pace of the lesson sequence working? Metacognition is a difficult concept for many adults to grasp and here it is being presented to kindergarten students. Therefore, it is critical to get an accurate idea of what the students really understand. Was there too much information presented in one week of instruction? Do the students need additional practice with either the vocabulary term or the concept or even with the implementation? Do the students understand the signs

associated with metacognition and when, and how, to use those signs appropriately? Are the texts and materials being used sufficiently engaging and appropriate for the class?

While this series of lessons can be adapted to integrate with any unit of study, some texts work better than others. Each time this series of lessons is taught something new is likely to emerge. Taking adequate time to regularly reflect on and review the nuances of the lesson experience is necessary for continued teacher success. New ideas will come to you throughout the day and night, and you will have to continue the reflection process as you and the students embark upon additional comprehension strategy instruction throughout the course of the year.

The series of lessons in this unit are intended only to provide an introduction to metacognition. It is a concept that will continue to be reinforced, discussed, and practiced throughout the year. The students will have many opportunities to think about their own thinking and demonstrate the metacognitive skills that they have developed over the course of the school year.

Appendix to Lesson Plan Rationale

In lieu of using subtitles for my lesson plan rationale, I created this chart to provide at a glance how my thinking about learners and learning, the learning environment, curriculum and strategies, and assessments fit into my practice.

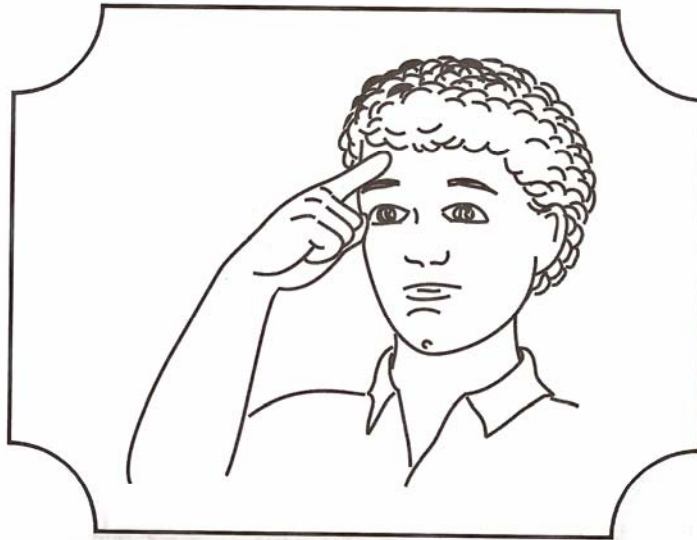
Lesson Plan Rationale at a Glance

<p>Learners and Learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -kindergarteners are far more capable than we previously believed and that their future reading success depends on having a genuine partnership in learning -students cannot be expected to comprehend what they are reading, and more importantly discuss their comprehension processes, without being provided the appropriate vocabulary -kindergarten students come to school eager to learn, thirsty for knowledge and when provided with appropriate instruction they blossom -...they are playing an active role in their learning -students have to work to attain comprehension of a text, regardless of reading ability -these processes will eventually transfer to reading comprehension as the students become more able to read texts on their own
<p>Learning Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -...each lesson begins by bringing the students to the carpet. This activity serves a dual purpose. First, it is much easier for everyone to see the text and hear the teacher, as well as one another, when seated together on the carpet. Second, when the class is physically close in a learning environment, it helps to create community spirit -in kindergarten, taking a risk may be as simple as being willing to share your ideas in front of your teacher and classmates
<p>Curriculum and Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -strand 1 lessons: instruction before the point of need

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the processes associated with listening comprehension are the same as those associated with reading comprehension -read-aloud and think-aloud -if the child is depicting a prediction, it is important to ask that child not only what she is predicting, but why she thinks that is a valid prediction -by asking students what piece they don't understand and giving them instruction at the point where the breakdown occurred, it becomes a strand 2 lesson -it is just as important to teacher comprehension processes with non-fiction as it is with fiction - the students will have many opportunities to think about their own thinking
<p>Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -some kindergarten students may not yet be ready to verbalize their thought processes but are able to express what they are thinking through artwork -having students talk about their pictures helps to determine the extent of their comprehension -providing students with several options for showing their knowledge -even the students who report that they do not understand something are revealing a high level of metacognitive understanding -a total body movement response as an appropriate means for demonstrating knowledge...is fun for students and provides teachers with real time assessment of students' knowledge -spot checking students regarding their process choice presents an opportunity to probe more deeply into their thinking. If a student reports she is predicting for something, she can be encouraged to share her thinking with the class

Sample Sign Poster

Ask Questions



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