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How the Instruction and Use of Three Metacognitive Reading Strategies Helped Fourth Graders Find Success and Enjoyment in Reading Informational Text

Kimberly Anne Klein

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How the Instruction and Use of Three Metacognitive Reading Strategies Helped Fourth Graders Find Success and Enjoyment in Reading Informational Text

By

Kimberly Anne Klein

August 2011

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
How the Instruction and Use of Three Metacognitive Reading Strategies Helped Fourth Graders Find Success and Enjoyment in Reading

Informational Text

By

Kimberly Anne Klein

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of Problem

At the start of each school year, when I give my annual "Introduction to Social Studies" pep talk in which I share with my fourth grade students the different projects and historical events that they will be learning, they leave the class chatting excitedly about how they “can’t wait” to learn about the Iroquois and other bits of New York State history. Unfortunately, as the year progresses, I find that their initial excitement does not automatically translate into an understanding of the content, as the majority of the students struggle with the vocabulary, concepts, and overarching themes of New York State’s rich history.

I notice that their excitement to learn seems to lose momentum when it comes to reading informational text in the form of textbooks and other non-fiction trade books. They seem to get lost in the organization and representation of the content in addition to the sophisticated and specific language. When I ask my students to think about a concept they have studied and relate it to their own lives,
they have difficulty expressing their thoughts. As their teacher, I found this highly discouraging, and wanted to figure out ways to better support their abilities. In my experience, when students are unable to make connections to their learning they are less likely to comprehend and remember what they have been taught.

For many elementary students, fourth grade can be a challenging year as the learning focus shifts from decoding narrative texts to a more involved understanding of expository, or informational text. Expository text refers to nonfiction reading material used to inform or explain information to the reading audience. The primary purpose of expository, or informational text is to convey information about the natural or social world (Duke, 2004). Expository texts include textbooks, encyclopedias, scientific books/journals, atlases, directions, guides, biographies, and newspapers. Gregg and Sekeres (2006) suggest that as students encounter more complex informational text, typically in fourth grade, their comprehension tends to drop significantly. They have found that children in grades K-3 are more likely to be exposed to narrative texts rather than expository. The lack of exposure to expository texts along with the missed
opportunity to acquire the skills needed for comprehension of this type of text are possible causes for the drop in comprehension as students reach fourth grade (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006).

As the resident social studies teacher for my fourth grade team, I have witnessed first hand the struggles my students encounter in reading and understanding expository texts. When they read expository text, whether it is from the textbook or informational magazines, my students do not seem to read for meaning in the way they do with narrative texts. I believe that they see reading informational text as more of an assignment than anything else. I do not believe that they make connections to the text; rather, I find that they skim for answers or bits of information to fulfill an assignment or answer a question.

Being passionate about my fourth grade students' achievements and growth, I was eager to find ways to help them be active, meaning making readers while working with informational texts. I wanted to help them make personal connections to what they read, and become more engaged in the text forms of which they would be increasingly asked to use in their future studies, informational text.
Significance of Problem

As adults, we are consistently surrounded by informational text. From newspapers, to magazine, to Web sites, the necessity of being able to make meaning from informational text is paramount (Duke, 2004). As Duke (2004) suggests, “Success in schooling, the workplace, and society depends on our ability to comprehend this material” (p. 40). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of American students in various subject areas, fourth grade students should be expected to work with 50 percent informational passages in their learning (Duke, 2010). Unfortunately, many elementary students across the nation are ill prepared to read and comprehend such complex text, because much of their experience has been working with narrative texts (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006).

While most educators are aware of the important roles that informational text play in our lives, Duke (2010) suggests that in comparison to other nations across the world, U.S. students have the largest gap between literary reading achievement and informational reading achievement of any nation studied. As I mentioned earlier,
many American students lack exposure to and instruction of informational text in the early elementary grades, which negatively impacts their learning as they progress through the grades (Duke, 2010).

In their study, Moss and Newton (2002) found a relative lack of informational text in their examination of basal reading programs. With all the research that has been conducted regarding students’ abilities to read and comprehend informational text, it is clear that educators need to focus their attention on the instruction of strategies for reading informational text, helping students to make meaning of what they read (Duke, 2004). As our students progress through their schooling they will be asked to read and comprehend more and more informational text. I believe that a combination of early, frequent exposure to informational text along with explicit instruction of metacognitive comprehension strategies is necessary and beneficial if we wish to impact our students learning. Metacognition is the awareness of one’s own thinking during reading (Philbrick, 2009). According to Hacker (1998), metacognition is the reader’s awareness of his or her own thinking while reading, which flows from the reader’s
inner thoughts and involves a unique perspective for each reader. Effective comprehension involves both metacognitive and cognitive processes that interact with the reader’s prior knowledge and experiences and his or her understanding of the structure and syntax of language (Hacker, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore what would happen when I provided my students with metacognitive reading strategies in order to promote their engagement with and understanding of expository texts. To do so, I focused on three metacognitive strategies that I explicitly instructed in a series of small group settings; connecting, imaging, and predicting. I provided the students with time to practice the strategies independently using expository texts such as magazines, textbooks, and nonfiction books. I wanted to make a difference in the way my students read nonfiction information. I wanted them to see the value in reading such texts, and teach them ways to make sense of what they read.
I hoped to further my understanding of the role metacognitive strategy instruction played in students’ reading of expository text. I also hoped to enhance my abilities as a researcher. I believe that reviewing current educational research will make me a better teacher. Being aware of and understanding current practices that have been proven to positively affect student achievement is important to me as I grow as a teacher. Taking the time to review the literature, conduct my own study, and analyze the data not only improved my research skills, it also made me a more responsive and knowledgeable teacher.

The research question that I used to guide my study was: How does the instruction of specific metacognitive strategies influence my fourth graders’ reading of expository text?

Study Approach

For this study I used a qualitative approach to explore the influence that my metacognitive strategy instruction had on students’ reading development using expository texts. To do this I collected and analyzed data from student surveys, my observations, anecdotal notes, and student interviews. The research occurred over a period of
six weeks. During this time, I taught explicit metacognitive strategies to my students using expository texts during small group instruction. My students then used a variety of expository texts to independently practice the strategies.

The study took place in small group instruction for forty-five minutes during my ninety-minute reading block. The class was a heterogeneous group made up of twenty-one students with varying abilities in reading. There were eleven girls and ten boys. The community in which the elementary school was located was rural and had a growing poverty rate. There were approximately 11,000 residents in the community, 50 percent of whom lived within the village. Many families moved back and forth from neighboring communities and there was little parent involvement in school functions.

**Rationale**

I believe that exposing students to expository text and helping them make meaning of it can be challenging. In my work as a fourth grade teacher, I often used expository texts in my instruction. In social
studies and science, students were required to read from the
textbook, as well as a number of other informational texts such as
maps, encyclopedias, and newspapers. I found that many of my
students struggled trying to make sense of the text structures and
sophisticated language in the informational texts that we used on a
daily basis in class.

The fact that my students found this type of text to be so
challenging was problematic considering a significant portion of the
curriculum I was required to teach involved the use of informational
text. Fourth graders were also required to take three, high-stakes
state assessments at the end of the school year, which included
reading informational text. If students scored poorly on the state
assessments they may have been removed from a portion of their
class the following year and be placed in an intensive intervention
class. For these reasons, I chose to study how the instruction of
metacognitive strategies influenced my students’ reading development
while using expository texts.

Becoming more experienced in working with my fourth graders
and informational texts not only improved my abilities as a teacher,
but also the education of my students. The reason I designed the study in the way that I did was because it would not take away from my regular instruction, but instead compliment it. I was able to conduct the study during my small group reading time when I had more freedom to create lessons tailored to my students’ needs. I chose to use expository texts based on the research of Duke (2010), Gregg and Sekeres (2006), Alvermann, Swafford, and Montero (2004) among others, which recommend more explicit instruction and student exposure of expository texts. I strongly believed that working with expository text is important for today’s students, and wanted to see how teaching metacognitive strategies might positively affect their learning.

Summary

The ability to read and make meaning from informational text is of increasing importance in the lives of our students (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). However, at least one study has reported that many American students struggle when reading non-fiction informational text (Duke, 2010). Experts such as Gregg and Sekeres (2006), Frey
(2006), Michalsky, Mevarech, and Haibi (2009) agree that students need to be taught how to read expository text if they are expected to comprehend what they read.

My aim was to investigate the influence metacognitive strategy instruction had on my fourth grade students' abilities to read expository texts. In order for my students to successfully interact with and understand informational text, I had to find ways to help them think about what they read in an active way.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Concern regarding our children’s reading competency, and the quality of literacy instruction that they receive at school is felt across the nation. Literacy is a largely important issue being discussed both within our schools as well as in the public and professional arenas. Many teachers, parents, politicians, and researchers understand the value of sound literacy instruction, and continue to seek the best ways to deliver it to our children. In this chapter, I examine the research within the areas of metacognitive strategy instruction, explicit instruction and expository text.

Metacognitive Strategy Instruction

Most teachers agree that the main purpose of reading is for the reader to make meaning of what he or she is reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). To fortify this notion, teachers work diligently creating learning opportunities for students to observe, practice, and learn what good readers do while reading. Research shows that strategic readers have formed sound reading habits and apply proven reading strategies while engaging with text (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991).
In the past decade, researchers have studied metacognitive strategy instruction based on its effectiveness as a tool to enhance reading comprehension (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007; Eilers & Pinkley, 2006; Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009). While the researchers looked at the use of metacognitive strategies in different ways, they all had one common finding: metacognitive strategies benefit students’ reading in a number of ways, including comprehension, and vocabulary development.

In their study, Eilers and Pinkley (2006) discussed the importance of metacognitive strategy instruction in regards to student comprehension and reading abilities. The researchers conducted their study in a first grade classroom of twenty-four students, six of whom received English Language Learner (ELL) services. Five of the participants were Hispanic, one was Asian/Pacific Island, and 18 were White.

The researchers established a baseline as a pretest based on the first graders’ archival data and specific comprehension assessment scores (DRA) taken two weeks prior to metacognitive strategy instruction. The researchers also gave the participants the Index of
Reading Awareness (IRA) in an effort to determine their level of cognitive thinking about reading prior to the intervention. The post-test given at the end of the study revealed significant difference between the pre and post test scores, with a considerable increase in DRA scores after the implementation of metacognitive strategies. The researchers also developed a Comprehension Strategy Checklist, which they used during small group instruction to record observations based on strategy use, and collected student samples of strategy use in the form of graphic organizers.

The researchers used explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies in both whole and small group settings as part of the intervention. The specific strategies taught were: using prior knowledge to make text connections, how to use context clues to make meaningful predictions, and how to sequence the events of a story. After learning specific reading comprehension strategies in a whole group setting, the participants received further support in small group instruction. They were also given the opportunity to practice the strategies using trade books at their appropriate level based on
recommendation from Fountas and Pinnell (2009). From the trade books, the students recorded observation onto a graphic organizer.

Nearing the completion of the study, when all data had been collected, the researcher analyzed and compared the IRA and DRA results looking for shifts in thinking and patterns. The analysis showed a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, and Reading Awareness scores were higher after the implementation of reading comprehension instruction. The results suggested the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy instruction and demonstrated the students’ increased use of the strategies during independent reading, which also increased comprehension (Eilers & Pinkley, 2006).

The researchers suggest their study’s findings are evidence that explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies is an effective instructional method.

Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, and Jashi (2007) found similar results in their study of 119 third-grade students in the southwest United States. In this study, the researchers aimed to determine the effectiveness of systematic direct instruction of metacognitive strategies on comprehension and vocabulary.
development. The research took place in six, third-grade classrooms in two separate urban elementary schools. One school received direct instruction as the intervention school, and the other was selected to be the comparison school. The schools were deemed demographically and academically equal by the school district’s research department (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Jashi, 2007).

The researchers gave participants a pre- and post battery test to measure their academic skill levels before and after the intervention of metacognitive strategies. The researchers pretested the students using the Word Attack, Letter-Word Identification, and Spelling subtests of the 2001 Woodcock Johnson III Test of Achievement (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2007). As part of the intervention students in both schools received 30 minutes of reading comprehension instruction a day for 25 days. The participants’ regular teachers delivered all metacognitive instruction, which included understanding author’s purpose, activating background knowledge, monitoring for understanding, and summarizing while reading (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Jashi, 2007).
A typical lesson in the research study at the intervention school followed a five-step format. Students read from expository passages and were provided direct instruction of metacognitive strategies. Each lesson contained five parts: 1) Introduction. The teacher stated the purpose of the lesson and activated students’ background knowledge by asking questions. 2) Vocabulary. The teacher introduced one or two new vocabulary words and used semantic webs to make meaning of the unfamiliar words. 3) Reading the story. Before reading the story students reviewed their answers to the questions from the lesson’s introduction. The students then read the story with the teacher’s guidance, and were encouraged to think aloud. 4) Summary. The teacher asked the participants specific questions regarding strategy use during reading. She also asked students to identify the main ideas and important pieces of the reading, which they would later write a summary with. 5) Questions. The teacher asked questions that the students answered orally, ranging from simple to complex (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Jashi, 2007).

Instruction differed at the comparison school, as they did not use semantic webs during vocabulary instruction. They did not use
think alouds during reading, and they did not identify important elements of the expository passage or write a summary. They did answer questions from the teacher orally, and also copied two or three questions from the board and wrote their answers on paper (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Jashi, 2007).

The researchers used a commercial reading comprehension curriculum Six-Way Paragraphs, Middle Level (Pauk, 2000). The students in both schools read the same expository text and engaged in many of the same introductory activities. However, the intervention school students incorporated more metacognitive strategies during and after their reading (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Jashi 2007).

After delivering a series of lessons involving metacognitive strategies, the researchers noted gains in participants’ comprehension of greater than 20 percent. Furthermore, the data from the students at the intervention school showed a greater amount of students’ incorporation of metacognitive strategies. The researchers found that metacognitive reading comprehension instruction significantly
improved the academic achievement of the third grade participants (Boulware-Goeden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Jashi, 2007).

In another study regarding the use of metacognitive strategy instruction, Philbrick (2009) examined the effects of explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies within the context of social studies content instruction. The study spanned a period of eleven weeks. One hundred thirty-one, fifth grade students from six different classes in a rural southwest Missouri school participated in the study. Philbrick (2009) randomly selected two classes to receive strategy instruction in the context of social studies instruction, two classes learned identical strategies during reading class instruction, and two classes were used as the control group in which they received no additional strategy instruction in the social studies class. Ninety-percent of the students were White and ten-percent were Hispanic. The majority of the students were from working class families (Philbrick, 2009).

Philbrick (2009) collected data in a few different ways. First, she administered the Index of Reading Awareness (IRA) in order to assess students' knowledge of metacognitive reading strategies. She also pre-tested students on their ability to read and comprehend a
number of social studies passages using a teacher-created instrument. At the end of the instructional period, Philbrick administered post-tests using the same instruments as in the pre-test in order to see any changes in the students’ knowledge of metacognitive reading strategies. Philbrick also administered surveys to teachers and students to record any changes in reading behavior due to the intervention (Philbrick, 2009).

In her analysis, Philbrick (2009) found that metacognitive strategy instruction proved to be beneficial to all students. Furthermore, she found that metacognitive instruction was especially beneficial when taught in connection with social studies content lessons. She taught her participants specific metacognitive strategies: questioning, summarizing, and making predictions while reading from their social studies textbook. She found that students who learned to use the metacognitive reading strategies and were able to practice the strategies in a number of contexts displayed improved confidence in their ability to think and to comprehend nonfiction text. They also said that they believe themselves to be better readers, understanding
more, thinking more efficiently, and enjoying reading more because it was easier (Philbrick, 2009).

Much of the research I found involved the use of metacognitive strategies in upper-elementary grades and higher (Philbrick, 2009, Van Keer, 2004, Duke, 2004), as many educators in the primary grades focus more on decoding rather than comprehension (Duke, 2010). However, the results of several studies show that the instruction of metacognitive strategies may benefit more than just upper grade students (Eilers & Pinkley, 2006).

Just as Philbrick (2009) found teaching metacognitive strategies beneficial in the context of social studies reading, so too, did Michalsky, Mevarech, and Haibi (2009) in the context of science and scientific text. In their study, Michalsky, Mevarech, and Haibi (2009) questioned the effects of metacognitive grouping (before, during, after) on domain-specific knowledge, general scientific literacy, and metacognitive awareness. They also wondered whether young learners at the elementary school level could benefit from metacognitive instruction (Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009).
Participants in the study were 108 fourth-grade students, 49 boys and 59 girls. The students were members of four randomly selected Israeli heterogeneous classes. The researchers randomly selected four teachers from ten teachers who volunteered to partake in the study. The certified teachers were all female, all held a degree in science, and all had more than six years of experience in teaching science (Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009).

The researchers used a number of data sources in their study. One measurement used was the Domain-Specific Test of Science Knowledge (TSK). The researcher administered the test twice: as a pre- and posttest assessment. The test assessed the students’ knowledge of the science curriculum relating to The World of Organisms’ Lives: Animals and Plants. The researchers also administered the Test of Science Literacy (TSL) once at the beginning of the study, and once at the end. This test documented the students’ literacy in five major components of scientific experiments: describing phenomena, formulating hypotheses, identifying dependent variables, identifying independent variables, and reporting the results and drawing conclusions. Lastly, the researchers administered an
adaptation of the Metacognition Awareness Questionnaire (MAQ) to assess the students' knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition (Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009).

During the instruction phase of the study, the four teachers taught three science lessons per week using the World of Organisms' Lives: Animals and Plants science learning unit over a period of four months. In only one of the three weekly lessons, the students in three classrooms receiving the metacognitive instruction (the fourth was the control group) were explicitly instructed on a specific strategy. One class learned the strategy before reading a scientific text, another class during reading, and the third class after. At the end of the four months, the researchers gave all students the post-test of the assessments (Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009).

After analyzing the data, the researchers found that embedding metacognitive instruction was more effective in developing the fourth graders' scientific literacy than not embedding metacognitive instruction. They further found that in comparison to metacognitive instruction prior to and during reading, students benefited most when
provided with the metacognitive strategy instruction after reading (Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009).

Explicit Instruction

Learning to read is a crucial learning process that our students are involved in from their early years of life. Teaching children the skills and strategies necessary to become proficient readers requires careful, meaningful planning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). Explicit instruction of specific reading strategies can enhance reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and student engagement (Van Keer, 2004; Philbrick, 2009).

According to his synthesis of research on explicit teaching, Rosenshine (1986), states that explicit instruction is when a teacher presents new material in small steps that is then followed up by student practice. He further recommends the practice of explicit instruction for a broad array of students, ranging from elementary to high school (Rosenshine, 1986). Explicit instruction involves giving clear, detailed instructions and guiding students during initial practice (Rosenshine, 1986). This belief is further supported by educational
researchers Protheroe and Clarke (2008), who discussed three important components of explicit instruction delivery: what the strategy is, how to apply it, and when and where to use it. They recommend explicit instruction consist of sequential steps of 1) teacher modeling, 2) structured opportunities for students to practice and apply skills with teacher feedback, and 3) opportunities for students to appropriately generalize new learning to others tasks (Protheroe & Clarke, 2008). Rosenshine also discusses the need for children to actively practice and process new learning. This can be achieved through teacher scaffolding of instruction and providing students with time for individual practice (Rosenshine, 1986).

Explicit instruction teaches children to be more attentive to their thinking processes during reading (Philbrick, 2009). As Philbrick (2009) mentioned in her study of strategy instruction, the National Reading Panel (2000) found that effective comprehension instruction should involve teaching students to read strategically, to view reading as a puzzle that they as the reader are to solve, and to intentionally interact with the text. The National Reading Panel study also found that when children observe adults modeling their own thinking process
they are able to comprehend more and understand the reading process better (Philbrick, 2009).

In her experience as a teacher, Walker (2005) found that her fourth grade students needed more than just a model of strategy use; they needed to be explicitly taught how it worked and how they could use it to become successful readers. In combining explicit instruction through the think-aloud technique, and developing a strategy self-evaluation sheet, Walker found improved strategy use by her students, along with greater self-efficacy and increased engagement and comprehension. She found that providing her students with explicit instruction and the internal thinking of a good reader helped her struggling readers to internalize the comprehension process (Walker, 2005).

Van Keer (2004) examined the educational benefits of explicit reading strategies instruction, followed by practice in a teacher-led whole-class activities, and peer tutoring on fifth graders' reading comprehension achievement. Van Keer argues that there is a need for explicit strategy instruction in the elementary grades, noting that such
instruction may make students more aware of strategy selection in terms of its purpose and benefits (Van Keer, 2004).

Participants in Van Keer’s study came from 22 classrooms in 19 schools, 454 students in all. Almost all classes had a mainly white population from middle-class families. Ages of the students ranged from 9-12 years old with an approximately even gender distribution. Van Keer used a quasi-experimental pretest post-test retention test design with three experimental groups and one control group, and found that explicit strategy instruction along with peer tutoring made a significant increase in reading comprehension (Van Keer, 2004).

Van Keer’s (2004) findings regarding explicit instruction are supported by Eilers and Pinkley (2006) who examined the effects of explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies on the reading comprehension of first graders. They found that the reading comprehension of students might be positively affected by explicit instruction of strategy use (Eilers & Pinkley, 2006).
Expository Texts

The use of expository text in upper elementary classrooms is common practice (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006). Students in third, fourth, and fifth grade read from textbooks, informational books, and other sources of non-narrative texts as opposed to narrative texts used in the early elementary years. These changes in reading activities result in children being exposed to increasingly difficult expository texts as early as third grade (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008). Furthermore, state tests require students to read, comprehend, and respond to informational passages more and more as early as third grade. Research by Olson (1985), Spiro and Taylor (1980), and Tun (1989) suggests that elementary-students have greater difficulty comprehending expository text than narrative text.

In their study, Best, Floyd, and McNamara (2008) researched the influence of reading decoding skills and world knowledge on third graders’ comprehension of narrative and expository text in an effort to explain what is commonly referred to as the “fourth grade slump” (p. 138). The researchers hoped to find the different competencies that support third grader’s comprehension of expository texts in
comparison to narrative texts. In their study, they noted that in contrast to narrative texts, expository texts tend to place increased processing demands on the reader due to their greater information density, greater structural complexity, and greater knowledge demands (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008).

The participants were 61 third grade students from two separate public schools in a large metropolitan school district. Their ages ranged from 8 years, 4 months, to 10 years, 7 months. Fifty-two percent of the participants were girls, and 48 percent were boys. Approximately 57 percent of the participants were African American, 28 percent white, 7 percent biracial, and 3 percent were Asian-Pacific Islanders. The average median income level of the participants' families was $35,874 (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008).

The researchers tested the students' comprehension and world knowledge using a number of recall tasks and multiple-choice questions from a variety of both narrative and expository texts. They collected and analyzed data from the comprehension test by coding recall. They also conducted a proposition-based analysis in which they
assessed the number of propositions recalled from the retell tasks (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008).

In their analysis of the data, they found that for expository text, world knowledge was a much stronger and often singular predictor of comprehension. They were able to conclude that children with less prior knowledge will struggle to form a coherent situation model when reading expository texts as they are unable to generate the necessary inferences. They found that world knowledge added approximately 14 percent to the prediction of comprehension measured by the multiple choice questions, and more than 21 percent to the comprehension measured by the cued recall (Best, Floyd, & McNamara, 2008, p. 152-153).

Best, Floyd, and McNamara (2008) concluded that narrative texts are usually comprehended more successfully in comparison to expository texts, and that reader competencies of world knowledge and decoding skills have differential importance during the comprehension of texts from different genres. They found that decoding skills are more useful to students when reading a narrative text, whereas world knowledge is more useful when reading an
expository. They recommend the use of instructional techniques and student-driven strategies to match student’s knowledge more appropriately to texts, and highlight the benefits of teaching students strategies to help them connect informational text to their prior knowledge.

In her study, Barbara Moss (2008) compared the text-genres represented in two California-adopted basal readers (grades 1-6) with the guidelines for informational text types in the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) framework. Moss looked at the number of pages and number of selections of each text genre: narrative, poetry, play, or nonfiction, and then classified the nonfiction selections into four more categories: literary nonfiction, expository, argumentation or persuasive, or procedural or documents.

She found that after first grade, half or more of all selections from one of the basals (Program A) were nonfiction, increasing to a peak at fifth and sixth grade (59-69 percent). In the second basal program (Program B) she found a smaller percentage of nonfiction selections at both the primary and upper grade levels (13-24 percent). While the selections varied across both basal programs, she found that
in both series nonfiction increased and narrative text declined across grade levels. Furthermore she found that in regards to number of pages, Program A had 57-66 percent narrative pages, whereas Program B had 62-82 percent narrative. Non-narrative page percentage was much smaller than narrative, representing about 40 percent in both series. She further found that 50 percent of nonfiction text selections were expository while 33 percent were literary nonfiction (Moss, 2008).

Moss’ findings suggest that publishers of basal reading programs are including more nonfiction text than in the past, as her data shows about 40 percent non-narrative text selections compared to a 1986 study by Flood and Lapp which found only 32 percent non-narrative selections. However, her data also shows that neither basal series used in her research met the 2009 NAEP criteria of 50 percent informational text. She suggests a need for not only more information text to meet the guidelines, but for also a greater variety in types of information text (Moss, 2008).

In her research, Nell Duke (2010) supports Moss’s (2008) findings that children are not receiving enough experience with
informational text in the early years of schooling. In a study she conducted in 2000, Duke found that only 9.8 percent of books and other materials found in first grade classroom libraries were informational text. She further noted that only 3.6 minutes of the instructional day were devoted to informational text, with the number lowering to 1.9 in low-socioeconomic settings (Duke, 2010).

In her article *The Case for Informational Text*, Duke (2004) makes a number of suggestions for the use of informational texts in the classroom. She recommends increasing students’ access to informational text, and teaching younger students the range of purposes that informational text can serve. Another recommendation she makes is to increase the time students spend working with informational text during different instructional activities. Using informational text as a read aloud may aid students in becoming familiar with its characteristics and conventions. Using informational text in guided and independent reading and writing as well as in content-area instruction may also benefit students (Duke, 2004).

Duke also suggests explicitly teaching students comprehension strategies so that they may be strategic in their reading of non-
narrative texts. Teaching the strategy should include information of what the strategy is, when to use it, how it is used, and why it’s worth using. Her final recommendation is to use informational text for authentic purposes. She believes that children need to understand the reasons why we read information text— to obtain information on what you want to know. She feels that students are all too often required to read an expository text to answer questions at the end of chapter instead of for authentic purposes. Setting up situations in which students will need to find information is one way to create authentic purposes in the classroom (Duke, 2004).

College professors, Gregg and Sekeres, (2006) discussed the high expectations that fourth grade (and beyond) teachers have for their students regarding their ability to read and comprehend expository texts, when in fact their students are ill-equipped to make sense of such text. They suggest the use of strategy instruction to build student comprehension of expository text. They believe teachers need to carefully plan and monitor for building and activating background knowledge, teach vocabulary, and scaffold instruction if
they hope to see greater comprehension of expository texts by their students (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006).

Gregg and Sekeres (2006) further discuss the benefits of using different forms of expository text in the early elementary classroom noting the enjoyment students receive from reading information text, as well as the home-school connection information text can create, as what the students read may more closely resemble the topics parents discuss with them at home (Gregg & Sekeres, 2006).

Summary

A common theme across the literature that I presented in this chapter is the importance of quality literacy instruction. Additionally, the use of specific metacognitive strategies benefits students in a number of ways, including comprehension and vocabulary development. Explicit instruction is beneficial in aiding students’ thinking process and comprehension, as well as engagement with texts. Furthermore, the literature suggests teachers’ use of expository texts in the lower elementary grades is not as common as is in the
upper grades, even though research demonstrates benefits to students who are exposed to nonfiction material at an earlier age.
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence my instruction of specific metacognitive strategies had on my fourth graders’ reading of expository text. The three metacognitive strategies that I chose to use in this study were connecting, creating images, and predicting.

Research Question

I focused on the research question: How does the instruction of specific metacognitive strategies influence my fourth graders’ reading of expository text?

Participants

For this study, I invited my twenty-one fourth grade students to participate. There were ten boys and eleven girls all between the ages of nine and ten. I chose the participants based on accessibility and convenience. The students came from varying socioeconomic backgrounds and were of a number of different ethnicities. Their
reading abilities varied, with seven reading below grade level, four above grade level, and the remainder at grade level. Approximately half of the students received specialized reading interventions such as Soar to Success (2008) and Triumphs (2009), based on their performance on state and district assessments.

The community in which the elementary school was located in was rural and had a growing poverty rate. There were approximately 11,000 residents of the community, 50 percent who lived within the village. Many families moved back and forth from neighboring communities, and there was little parent involvement in school functions. When reporting the study’s findings, I ensured the confidentiality of all participants through the use pseudonyms.

Context of the Study

The setting in which my study took place was my own fourth grade classroom. The layout of the classroom consisted of five desk groups, a small corner library, a teacher desk area, and a student coat closet. Space was tight but the room was clean, organized, and comfortable.
The school day began at 8:30 am as students arrived. The morning bell rang at 8:50, and after morning announcements and snack the day began. The English Language Arts block ran from approximately 9:00 to 10:30, a full ninety minutes. Within this block was a 45-minute whole group instruction period and a 45-minute small group/work station period. The small groups were created by reading ability, which is based on students’ weekly core test results and DIBELS (2005) data, as mandated by the district. However, groups were flexible and instruction was differentiated based on student need.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I am a Caucasian woman from a middle-class background who grew up in a rural community in western New York. I am nearing the end of graduate coursework for my master’s degree in childhood literacy at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. I have an initial New York State certification in childhood education grades 1-6, and am working toward an additional certification in special education. I have spent the past two years studying the elements of childhood literacy in an effort to become a literacy specialist. Prior to
my graduate studies, I spent four years studying the many elements of effective teaching, and was also a history major.

Professionally, I have taught for three years in the school district in which the study will take place in the same position as a fourth grade teacher. Currently, I am the social studies teacher for my fourth grade team and expose my students to expository texts such as nonfiction text, primary documents, encyclopedias, and textbooks, on a daily basis. I enjoy teaching social studies and am always looking for ways to enhance my instruction and their learning. I've found that many of my students struggle with making meaning of the different expository texts that we use in class, which is one reason why I wished to conduct this study.

I believe that students should be not only exposed to a variety of different forms of text, but they should also be taught how to read and make meaning from them. I wanted my students to enjoy reading informational text, and to also feel confident in their ability to make meaning of what they read. Because we used different forms of informational text so often in my classroom, and because it is a type of text that my students will frequently use in the future as adults, I
felt it was my responsibility as their teacher to best prepare them for this type of reading.

Data Collection

For this study, I collected several different types of data: observations, surveys, interviews, student work samples, and a research journal. I collected the data over a period of six weeks during small group reading instruction as well as during independent reading. I anticipated that these data collection methods would yield a low risk to participants and would highly benefit my colleagues and fellow teachers.

Observations

As the researcher and teacher, I was a participant observer for this study. I observed the participants’ interaction, discussion, and engagement with text. I also observed the participants during small group instruction as well as independent reading. To record my observations I designed an observational note sheet that I used to record data on and then later analyze (see Appendix A). This data
helped me document and understand the ways in which students interact with expository text after metacognitive strategy instruction. I wanted to be able to see if and how my students use the three metacognitive strategies that I explicitly instructed.

Surveys

I administered the survey (see Appendix B) to the students two times during the study, at the start as well as at the end, after instructing metacognitive strategies. I gave the surveys in order for me to assess any shifts in the students' thinking in regard to metacognitive strategies and active engagement in texts. The data that I collected informed me of how my students' thinking had developed over the course of the study.

Focus Group Interview

In addition to observations and surveys, I facilitated a focus group interview with a small group of approximately six student participants (see Appendix C). I randomly selected the six focus group participants. The focus group interview served to assess students'
final thoughts of the metacognitive strategies of connecting, creating images, and predicting, as well as active engagement while reading. Time was a minor risk for participants, as the interview will took no more than 30 minutes after school. I audio recorded the interview and transcribed the interview in its entirety. The questions were open ended and discussion between participants was to be expected. The participants’ responses to the interview questions helped me examine the impact the small group metacognitive strategy instruction had on students’ perceptions of expository text, and their thoughts involving active engagement while reading.

Student Work and Artifacts

I also collected and analyzed student work and artifacts over the course of the six weeks. This included post-it notes, written responses, and illustrations. I anticipated that the student work and artifacts would allow me to see how the students were or were not applying the three strategies.
Research Journal

I also used a research journal as part of my data collection process. The journal provided a place for me to reflect on my teaching of the strategies. It served as a space in which I could think about what my students were and were not doing in relationship to my instruction of the three strategies.

Data Analysis

I used the observations, student surveys, focus group interview, student work and artifacts, and research journal to triangulate the data. I completed a cross-analysis of all of the forms of data, looking for broad patterns and themes.

Observations

The observations that I recorded allowed me catch changes in student thinking and interactions over the six-week study. I analyzed the observations by reading and rereading the data, noting trends or patterns that were then coded and organized into themes.
Surveys

After administering the first survey I analyzed the initial survey data to establish a baseline of my students' understanding related to the three metacognitive strategies. With this information I was able to inform my instruction of the strategies over the course of the six-week study. I then administered, collected, and analyzed the second survey searching for information of how my students' understanding had changed over the course of the six weeks.

Focus Group Interview

After administering the focus group interview I transcribed the students' responses verbatim. I read and reread the transcripts multiple times identifying and coding initial patterns among and between the students' responses. I anticipated this process would enable me to identify key themes related to the students' understanding of the three metacognitive strategies.
Student Work and Artifacts

After collecting the student work and artifacts I analyzed the data to see how students were using the strategies taught, if at all. This also allowed me to get a better understanding of the effectiveness of my strategy instruction, and informed future instruction of the strategies.

Research Journal

My use of a research journal allowed me to record my experiences and deepen the understanding of my work. I anticipated that the notes and observations that I recorded in my research journal would provide me with examples of physical evidence of the students' growth. Through the analysis of my research journal entries, I gained insight into my teaching of the strategies. I was also able to consider my thinking about research and teaching throughout the course of the study.
Time Schedule

My study began May 11, 2011. Data was collected by June 17, 2011. I continued with data analysis through the summer 2011 semester.

Procedures

The study will extend over a period of six weeks. I presented the metacognitive strategies in a series of mini-lessons followed up by individual reading time for strategy practice. Though I worked with students in a small group setting every day I allotted only three days of metacognitive instruction per week as I had other instructional obligations to conduct during the other two days of the week. For this study I conducted instruction and data collection during my small-group reading instruction block for a period of 45 minutes three times a week. I used the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) for each strategy during the second day of each week. I had not previously taught nor had my students previously used any of the strategies used in the study. I was required to follow the basal reading series my school used very strictly, but had some
flexibility in small group settings. Below is my sequence of how the study unfolded.

Week One

On day one of the first week one I conducted the initial survey and presented a mini-lesson on different forms of expository text through the use of read alouds and shared reading to different forms of informational text including nonfiction books, magazines, textbooks, newspaper articles, and websites. We then discussed the different purposes and uses of informational text and why reading such types of text could be beneficial.

On days two and three of week one I presented a mini-lesson on the meaning of the word metacognitive. I explained the purpose of metacognitive strategies and why good readers use them when reading different types of texts. I explained to the students that metacognition means thinking about thinking, something we would all be working on in future reading.
Week Two

In the second week I began the actual instruction of strategies. The first strategy that I taught was connecting. To do this I read *People of the Longhouse: How the Iroquoian Tribes Lived*, by Jillian and Robin Riddington (1995) to the students. Using the book, I demonstrated making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections. I spent the remainder of the instructional period reinforcing connections with some independent practice by the participants. The third day, the students independently practiced the strategy as I observed their interactions with the text. I had students use sticky notes to mark parts of the book that they were able to connect with, and used graphic organizers to help students keep track of their thoughts (see Appendix D).

Week Three

During the third week, I introduced the creating images strategy. I demonstrated for the students through think-alouds while reading the book, *Pompeii: Lost and Found*, Mary Pope Osborne (2006). I chose this book because of its descriptive words. I demonstrated to the
students how to use your five senses to picture what is being read. I also had students illustrates their images and practice using their senses. The students used the second and third days of week three for individual practice. I also provided my students with a worksheet to illustrate their images (see Appendix E) and another worksheet to help them practice using their senses to create images (see Appendix F). I used this time to make observations on their interactions with the text and use of the strategy.

Week Four

During the fourth week, I introduced the prediction strategy. I demonstrated how to use pictures, headings, and subheadings to make predictions involving the text before, during, and after reading. To do this I selected the text, *Oil Spill! Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico*, by Elaine Landau (2011). I chose this book because it was an informational book that included a number of charts, headings, and subheadings that the students could practice making predictions with. On days two and three, my students continued working with the predicting strategy on their own as I continue recording observations.
I created a graphic organizer for students to record their predictions on (see Appendix G), which I then collected as student work samples.

Week Five

The fifth week I reviewed all three of the metacognitive strategies. I provided my students with a variety of expository texts (including magazines, newspapers, books, reference materials) to practice using the strategies with classmates and independently. I used this time to observe and record student interactions in regards to the strategies instructed.

Week Six

During the sixth and final week, I conducted the final survey and single focus group interview. I continued to provide time for students to practice using the metacognitive strategies instructed throughout the study. I observed my students during independent reading time, monitoring strategy use and development. During this period I continued to collect data as students had limited time to work with the strategies.
Criteria for Trustworthiness

My goal for this study was to present my findings in a truthful and professional manner. I was careful not to present my findings in a bias or judgmental way. I took every precaution not to be subjective when presenting the results of the study. I neither listed the name of the district in which the study took place, nor did I list the names of the participants.

The study itself extended over a period of six weeks in which I observed the participants daily for approximately 45 minutes. I administered one survey at the beginning of the study and one at the end, as well as an interview at the end of the study. I triangulated all sources of data. I also debriefed the participants in the study, and they were informed prior to the study that they may at any time change their mind and pull out of the study. During the course of my research I did persistent observation, as I observed participants throughout the study.

Experts of the field, including Boyles (2004), Fountas and Pinnell (2009), and Alvermann, Swafford, and Montero (2004), influenced my thinking regarding the importance of metacognitive instruction. I had
read a number of books and articles, which had impacted my own teaching. In regard to the importance of using expository text I was influenced by researchers and authors such as Duke (2010), Gregg, and Sekeres (2006), all of whom stressed the importance of informational reading in young students’ lives.

Limitations

As with all studies, limitations existed for this study. First, the study participants were my own students. Students from other classes studying the same content did not participate and were not represented in this study. With more participants, I may have been able to have a greater understanding of the influence metacognitive strategy instruction has.

A second limitation was the amount of time I had to conduct the research. I conducted the study three days a week for forty-five minutes. This provided only a snapshot of what my students’ abilities with the strategies were.

A third limitation was the type of data that I had chosen to use. Because the participants were my students, there was a chance that
they were not entirely honest on their surveys and in the interview discussions. This may have limited my study because it would mean my students might not provide the most precise view of their understanding. However, in an effort to reduce this limitation I collected numerous work samples from the students in an effort to provide a clearer understanding of the influence strategy instruction had on my students' reading of expository text.

A fourth limitation is that fact that I only used three metacognitive strategies. I chose these strategies after careful consideration of which metacognitive strategies would work best with expository texts, and which strategies would, in my opinion, most benefit my students. This may have been a limitation as students received instruction on only a portion of potential strategies. These limitations should be considered when reviewing this study.

Summary

The main purpose of this six-week study was to investigate the influence my instruction of three metacognitive strategies using expository text had on the reading development of my fourth grade
students. To do this I instructed my students on the metacognitive strategies of connecting, imaging, and predicting. I used five different methods of data collection: observations, surveys, a focus group interview, student work, and a research journal to see what influence, if any, the strategies had on my students’ development as readers and their engagement with expository texts. The multiple data sources enabled me to triangulate my analysis. All data that I collected was kept confidential and used only for the purposes of research. I was aware that there would be limitations to my study and did all that I could to work within the realities of my context, making the limitations as minimal as possible without compromising the quality of the findings.
Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how my instruction of three specific metacognitive reading strategies would influence my students’ reading of expository texts. The study took place during reading instruction and independent reading time in my fourth grade classroom over a period of six weeks. I spent the first week giving students the initial survey and introducing the meaning of expository texts and metacognitive strategies. I introduced the first metacognitive strategy, Connecting, during the second week. In the third week of the study I introduced Imaging, and in the fourth, Predicting/Wondering. In the fifth week I provided students opportunities to practice using the strategies independently. My students’ independent practice continued in the sixth week, along with final surveys and a focus group interview. The students who participated in the study were my own fourth grade students.

I collected data through student work samples, pre- and post-surveys, a recorded focus group interview, and a research journal throughout the six-week period. The study took place three days a week for approximately forty minutes.
Research Question

I analyzed the data based on my research question: How does my instruction of specific metacognitive strategies influence my fourth graders' reading of expository text? After analysis of the collected data, several themes and ideas began to emerge surrounding the research question: Strategy Use, Understanding and Engagement, and Book Choice.

Metacognitive Strategies and Expository Text

I believe that early exposure to and meaningful reading of expository texts can be beneficial to young students. In this study I questioned the influence my metacognitive strategy instruction had on the reading development of my fourth grade students while reading expository text. I chose to focus on three specific metacognitive strategies: Connecting, Imaging, and Predicting/Questioning. As indicated in the opening section of this chapter, I chose to teach a new strategy each week using lesson plans that I developed in order to scaffold the strategy instruction. After teaching the initial lesson for each strategy, I provided students with a follow up activity the next
day, along with time for independent practice with each specific strategy. Many of the workstations I created during reading instruction were centered on using expository text as well.

**Week One: Introduction to Expository Texts and Metacognition**

In the first week of the study I felt it was important to gauge my students’ knowledge of metacognitive strategies and expository texts through a series of open conversations. All of my conversations with students took place after they had taken their surveys (see Appendix B) on day one. I began the conversation on day two by asking my students what they thought expository text meant. I was not surprised to find that none of my students were familiar with the terms metacognition or expository, as they are not typical words found in a fourth grader’s vocabulary and words I had not used in my instruction prior to the start of the study. Once I explained to my students that expository text essentially means nonfiction, we moved forward with the conversation. I explained that instead of using the word “nonfiction,” our class would use the more sophisticated word,
“expository.” The students favored the idea of being sophisticated and quickly began replacing “nonfiction” with “expository” (see figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1: Conversation with Students about the Word Expository**

Miss Klein: How many of you are familiar with the term “nonfiction?” (all hands raise) Great! Would anyone like to share out loud what they believe nonfiction is?

Student: Nonfiction means books that aren’t a story.

Miss Klein: You’re right. Often times nonfiction books are not stories. What else do we know about nonfiction?

Student: You can read them to find out facts and stuff.

Miss Klein: Good! Can anyone point to a nonfiction book in our room? (fingers point in desks and towards classroom library). We have a lot of nonfiction books in our room. I bet many of you have already read a lot of our nonfiction books in our class library. But today I’m going to teach you a different word that we will be using instead of nonfiction. We are going to use a word that is very sophisticated. So sophisticated that even some adults don’t know the word! (takes out chart paper with the word “Expository” on it) Expository! Say it with me! Nonfiction books are also expository books. From now on, anytime we are talking about nonfiction we will use the word expository instead!

I next asked my students for some examples of expository texts.

In order to provide a visual support, I passed around the informational book, *Weather*, by Brian Cosgrove (2007). The students were familiar with the book, as we had been reading snippets of it each day after
lunch. After seeing the example of an expository text, the students seemed to be able to locate different expository texts in the classroom much easier. One student quickly raised his hand and pointed to an American Revolution book in his chair pouch, which he had been reading before class started. I explained that “yes,” that was an example of an expository text, and then displayed a series of other forms of expository texts: magazines, county maps, brochures, telephone books, and newspapers.

I explained that expository texts provide information to the reader, and then asked whether they believe the set of maps, brochures, and other examples could be considered expository text. I gave the students one minute to discuss the question with their group members and then had each group share its answer with the class (see Figure 4.2). From this conversation and their comments I was able to conclude that most students were clear as to the different forms of expository text.
Figure 4.2: Initial Student Discussion of Forms of Expository Text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1:</th>
<th>“We think that they are expository texts because if you are reading a map you are still getting knowledge so we think that would mean you are getting information.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 2:</td>
<td>“My group said that it might be expository but it might not because you do get information from those things but they aren’t books so they might not count.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3:</td>
<td>“We said it is expository because you can read a magazine for fun or you can read it for information too. If you read it for facts and stuff it would be expository.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4:</td>
<td>“A magazine can tell you facts about science and animals and things like that and a map gives you directions, so we think that would be expository text then.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then asked the students, “Why do you think we read expository texts?” Many of the students volunteered answers explaining that we read expository texts to “get smarter” or to “find facts and information.” I noted to myself that at this point none of the students mentioned reading expository texts for pleasure or enjoyment. I then asked the students, “How do you think you will use expository texts as you get older?” Even though we had discussed the different forms of expository texts (e.g., maps, dictionaries, and magazines), at this point in the study my students were unable to think of a reason as to why a
person would choose to read expository text other than for school purposes.

On the third day of the study I introduced my students to the term “metacognitive strategies” and found that they were unfamiliar with the term. I gave them a moment to attempt to pronounce metacognitive, which many were able to do fairly quickly. However, none of children were able to explain its meaning. Using terminology from Boyles (2004), I explained that metacognition means “thinking about thinking.”

To illustrate this idea I asked my students to think of a time when they were reading a book and, upon coming to the end of the reading, they found themselves unsure of what they had just read. I explained that this happens to all of us from time to time, but it’s certainly not a good thing. I further explained that good readers think metacognitively. They are aware of their thinking and whether or not they paying attention to what they are reading while they are reading it. Many of my students raised their hands to share experiences in which they were not thinking metacognitively and ended up having to go back and re-read a text. I then asked the open-ended question,
“Why should you think about what you’re reading?” Many students believed thinking about their reading process and what they are reading would be helpful in understanding and remembering what they read. After our conversations, the students and I created two anchor charts. One for Expository Texts, listing the meaning and the different forms, and the other for Metacognition and its meaning (see Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3: Class Created Expository and Metacognition Anchor Charts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Expository Texts</strong></th>
<th><strong>Metacognition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tells you information and facts</td>
<td>Means thinking about thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be books, encyclopedias, brochures, phone books, newspapers, etc.</td>
<td>Good readers do this while reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I hung the charts at the front of the classroom near the guided reading table and classroom library. I purposely placed them in there because it was a location where my students frequently spent reading. I felt the metacognition chart would serve as a good visual representation to return to during the strategy lessons as well as a nice reminder for students.
Week Two: Introduction to Metacognitive Strategies and Connecting Strategy

During the second week of the study I began my instruction of the three metacognitive strategies. I used the anchor chart we made the previous week to remind students of the meaning of metacognition. I then explained that they would be learning metacognitive strategies that would help them to become better readers. The first metacognitive strategy I instructed was connecting.

After a short discussion in which we reviewed the meaning of expository texts and metacognitive strategies, I began the whole class lesson. I started with a discussion regarding what good readers do. I explained that we would be learning three different ways to connect to what we read: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world. I further explained that connecting is the process that good readers use when he or she bridges what he or she is reading with his or her own life, a different book or text, and/or to the larger world.

In an effort to help my students relate the strategy to their own experiences, I asked them to think of a time when they picked up a book, flipped through it for a few minutes, and then put it down.
Almost all of the students’ hands rose, acknowledging having had such an experience. I described that one of the reason why they may not have been interested in a book so quickly was because they might not have felt connected to the book’s topic or content. Learning how to connect to a text could perhaps stop this obstructive pattern, and could ultimately lead to more enjoyable reading.

My students seemed excited to learn the strategy, mostly, I believe, because they knew that they had experienced the quick rotation of books all too often. Expository text can seem daunting to students as it often lacks a story line and pictures. I believe many of my struggling readers are more comfortable and interested in reading narrative texts rather than informational. While I am aware reading ability and interest play a role in my students’ book selection process, I believe my students do not always give a book a chance. My students’ initial interest in the connecting strategy led me to believe that they had perhaps never considered the notion that quickly flipping through a book and then putting it back to replace it with another did not help improve their reading abilities or learning.
To demonstrate how to use the connecting strategy I used an expository text that the students had not before read previously, *People of the Longhouse: How the Iroquoian Tribes Lived*, by Jillian and Robin Riddington (1995), which explores the life, and culture of the Iroquois people. I chose this text because it was one that my students had not read before, and also because we had recently finished a social studies unit about the five nations of the Iroquois. I wanted the students to have some background knowledge of the text to help facilitate the connecting strategy lesson.

I began by modeling a text-to-text connection using pre-selected sections of the book. After reading a short paragraph describing the formation of the five nations into the League, I paused and wrote my connection on a sticky note (see Figure 4.4). I discussed how I was able to connect what I already knew from reading our social studies book to what I was reading at that moment. I explained that because I am connecting one book to another I am making what we call a “Text-to-Text connection.”
Figure 4.4: Modeled Text-to-Text Connection

T-T-T
I remember reading this in our social studies textbook and on the American Indian website.

Next, I modeled how to make a text-to-self connection after reading a short selection on the roles and responsibilities of Iroquois children (see Figure 4.5). I explained that when I take what I read and connect it to something I have experienced in my own life, I am making a Text-to-Self connection. In this case I connected something that happened in my childhood to what I was reading.

Figure 4.5: Modeled Text-to-Self Connection

T-T-S
When I was a child I had different chores that I was responsible for. Just like this young girl in the picture, I too had to collect food for my family.
After I shared my connection, the students eagerly shared their own connections with doing chores and sharing household responsibilities. Not only did they recognize the similarities between their own lives and that of the Iroquois children, but they also pointed out the differences. While my intent was to model how to make a text-to-self connection, I was delighted to find my students already thinking about the expository text in a more analytical manner.

Lastly I modeled how to make a text-to-world connection (see Figure 4.6). To do this I read a short segment of the text describing the plants Iroquois women used to make herbal medicines and remedies. I chose this section because it lacked the appeal of interesting illustrations. Rather, it is mostly plain text with a few small illustrations of ferns and other plants. It seemed to me like a section that a student might skip over, and therefore a perfect example to illustrate the importance and usefulness of making connections. To demonstrate how to make this connection I explained that when I am making a connection to something that I have experienced in the real world, such as something I saw on T.V. or while on vacation, I am making a Text-to-World connection.
Figure 4.6: Modeled Text-to-World Connection

T-T-W
I've heard before that plants can be used as different medicines. My grandmother once told me that milkweed could be used to remove warts—just like it says in the book!

After sharing my text-to-world connection with my students, one student after another shared similar stories regarding his or her experiences with medicines and familiar plants in his or her rural community.

In the following two days, after reviewing the post-it notes and the different types of connections a good reader makes, I had the students practice making connections on their own. Using a variety of expository texts ranging from ocean life to tornadoes to the Civil War, which I had borrowed from our school library, I asked each student to choose a text that looked interesting. The texts included informational books, magazines, and brochures. I gave each student a post-it note and I asked him or her to read through the selected text and write an original connection on his or her post-it.
Some connections made by students were more meaningful than others. One student, for example, made a very broad connection, connecting an airplane book to an airplane story we had read the week before. Another student took the connection further describing what he read in the book and his recollection of a similar experience with his own family member. I was pleased with the amount of connections students made with the unfamiliar texts. While observing their independent reading, I noticed students using sticky notes on their own to keep track of connections (Research Journal, 5/18/11). Some students left their notes on my desk for me to view, others kept their notes as they were continuing connection making (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7: Examples of Students’ Connection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-T-T</th>
<th>T-T-S</th>
<th>T-T-W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because I’ve read about hot-water vents in a different book in science</td>
<td>My Dad and me look at the stars a lot. My connection is about Neil Armstrong who stepped onto the moon. My Dad told me about that before.</td>
<td>I remember last year when an Orca whale hurt its trainer. We talked about it in third grade. My book says Orcas are smart and are wild creatures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week Three: Imaging Strategy

During the third week of the study I introduced the imaging strategy. I began by asking students to recall a memory of a time when they received either really good or really bad news. I then asked them to tell me exactly where they were and who was with them. Each student took a turn sharing his or her memory with the others. Most were able to recall a detailed description of the memory and had little difficulty describing it. One student shared his memory of the day his little sister was born. Another remembered the day her cat was hit by a car. Both were able to vividly recall the memories with detail (see Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8: Students’ Memory Statements

Student A: I remember when my little sister was born. We were at my cousin’s house playing and my aunt came upstairs and told me that my mom had the baby! I was happy because then I got to hold my little sister.

Student B: My memory is when my kitty got run over. I came home from school and walked in and my mom took me into the living room and said that something sad happened. Then she told me Kitty died and I cried a lot and drew a lot of pictures of him and we still have them on our refrigerator.
To explain the importance and value of the imaging strategy, I shared that the reason why they were able to recall their memory so vividly was because they could picture it in their mind. I explained that when I picture things in my mind I am better able to remember them later on.

I then asked the students how this might relate to reading. After a moment of pair and share, the students reconvened for a group discussion regarding the relationship between creating sensory images in one’s mind and reading. Together we discussed how creating images in the mind while reading, especially while reading expository text, can make the text not only enjoyable, but can also help with recalling what was read.

Because I wanted the students to make sensory images, I decided to take the time to review the five senses. The students were easily able to recall all five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. However, they did not easily understand how any of the senses besides sight related to reading (see Figure 4.9).
Figure 4.9: Conversation with a Student about the Five Senses

Student: Um... Miss Klein I know how you can use sight to make pictures in your mind but I um... don’t get the other ones.
Miss Klein: Do you mean you don’t understand how the other four senses can be used when reading a text?
Student: Yeah.
Miss Klein: Well, say you were reading a book about Niagara Falls.
Student: Okay...
Miss Klein: What would you hear at Niagara Falls?
Student: Probably people talking and the water coming down.
Miss Klein: Right! So can you try picturing that in your mind?
Student: Yeah I can do that.
Miss Klein: What do you think you would feel? If you were standing right next to the falls, would you be able to feel anything?
Student: Maybe the water from the rocks? Or probably like the wind too.
Miss Klein: Good! You didn’t have to actually be at Niagara Falls to hear the water or feel the mist, right? It’s the same way when you create images from what you read in a text!

I then modeled how to use the imagining strategy reading an expository text that explored the disastrous eruption of Mount Vesuvius. In the text, *Pompeii: Lost and Found*, Mary Pope Osborne (2006) details the accounts of the eruption and its catastrophic
effect on the people of Pompeii. I chose this text because it was one that my students were not familiar with, but also because Pope Osborne’s writing includes vivid descriptions that I anticipated the students would be able to bring to life through imaging.

After reading aloud a segment describing the main marketplace in Pompeii, I asked the students to draw what they saw and describe it in a sentence. The students were able to pick up on small details listed in the description, as well as use their senses to create an even clearer image. I then had the students read a segment of the book quietly on their own and draw a picture of what they saw in their mind. Even when reading independently the students were able to successfully create and illustrate an image from the text (Research Journal, 6/8/11).

During the next two days, after reviewing what imaging meant, I modeled for the students how to fill out an imaging graphic organizer (Boyles, 2004). I chose to use the graphic organizer so that I could see concrete evidence of their use of the strategy. After modeling how to complete the graphic organizer I had the students choose an expository text with which to practice using the strategy. I then had
Many student work samples included appropriate illustrations in relation to what was read. The students also displayed their ability to use connect the five senses to their reading when completing the graphic organizer (Boyles, 2004). The organizers demonstrated the students’ abilities to successfully use the strategy in a meaningful way (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10: Students’ Imagining Graphic Organizers

![Students' Imagining Graphic Organizers](image-url)
During independent reading I encouraged students to continue using the imaging strategy. I observed sixteen of the students using the graphic organizers independently (Research Journal, 6/18/11). Nine of the sixteen used both the illustration graphic organizer and the five senses organizer. The remaining five students used only one of the graphic organizers. The five students who did not to use the graphic organizers chose instead to practice making connections using sticky notes.
Week Four: Prediction/Wondering Strategy

To teach the third strategy, predicting/wondering, I chose to use the expository text, *Oil Spill! Disaster in the Gulf of Mexico*, by Elaine Landau (2011). The book explores the events that took place in the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon oil spill. I chose this text because I knew my students had some knowledge of the topic, and because of the appealing photographs, diagrams, charts, and subtitles that I believed would be useful in making predictions. I explained to the students that predicting and questioning help keep a reader's mind focused on what he or she is reading, therefore helping to make better sense of the text.

I began teaching this strategy by modeling how to use clues from the front and back of the book. Using a think aloud, I discussed the title, the photograph on the front cover, and the description on the back cover. I explained how I could use the information as clues to predict what I would be reading. As one student described, by predicting I was “getting my brain ready for the book” (Research Journal, 6/1/11). As we read through the story I modeled how to look at the titles, subtitles, charts, and graphs on a page to predict
what the text was about. I then posed the question: "Why do you think looking at all of the subtitles, pictures, and graphs is helpful to me as a reader?" Figure 4.11 illustrates students’ responses.

**Figure 4.11 Making Predictions Conversations with Students**

- **Student A:** I think it’s helpful because it helps you to think about the page.

- **Student B:** Because if you look at those things then you already know what you will be reading. That way your brain will be ready to think about what you read.

- **Student C:** Sometimes I don’t look at those things so I think if I predict like that I will pay more attention

Over the next three days, the students practiced making predictions using a number of expository texts. I created a graphic organizer so that they would be able to record their thinking (see Figure 4.12). At first the students seemed to be challenged by making predictions. They understood how to make predictions before reading the text by looking at the cover, but became confused when I asked them to make predictions as they were reading (Research...
Because I believed learning to make predictions during reading was equally as important as before reading, I took a moment to model again how to make predictions during reading, and then again together as a shared activity.

Afterwards, when the students were asked to make predictions while reading, they demonstrated much more meaningful thoughts. As I walked around the room I observed students stopping, analyzing the page, and thinking about what text would be about before actually reading (Research Journal, 6/1/11). Afterwards, when I asked the students to reflect upon the experience, many shared that they felt that they were able to remember more from the pages they made predictions on, and that they felt it was easier to read once they knew what to expect.

Figure 4.12: Student Prediction Samples
Week Five and Six: Independent Practice

In the last two weeks of the study I continued to collect observation data along with student work samples as students practiced using the three metacognitive strategies. Because I was interested in seeing if and how students used the strategies, I did not assign students specific strategies to use. I did, however, require the students to read only from expository texts, though they were able to choose which text. Any strategies used by students while reading the expository texts were by choice. Surprisingly, all twenty-one of my students chose to use at least one of the strategies during independent reading period. This was surprising to me because while I assumed that many students would attempt the strategies independently, I was not sure if my struggling readers would feel comfortable doing so. I did notice that some students habitually used the same strategy again and again (Research Journal, 6/8/11). In such cases I encouraged the students to try using a different strategy instead. For example, I noticed that one student heavily favored the connecting strategy. The connections he was making were logical, however, I urged him to try using another strategy as well. He
attempted using the imaging strategy and was able to describe a meaningful interpretation of what he was reading using his senses (Research Journal, 6/14/11).

Use of Strategies Independently

Since the beginning of the six-week study I observed students during independent reading time. One of the big changes that I noticed from week one to week six was the frequency with which the students were using the strategies independently, by their own choice. As previously noted, while I did encourage students to use each of the strategies after I taught it, at no point did I assign strategy work to students. In my observation notes, I recorded all twenty-one students choosing to use at least one of the strategies at some point during independent work time (Research Journal, 6/14/11). I further noticed during my observations that the connecting strategy was the most frequently used strategy by my students, followed by imaging, and then predicting (Research Journal, 6/14/11) (see Figure 4.13).
While I was reading aloud from *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (O’Brien, 1986) after lunch, the students made a number of connections from the text to what they had learned and read in social studies, as well as vocabulary they had learned in reading (Research Journal, 5/18/11). Typically students relaxed during this daily read-aloud time. However, after learning the connecting strategy the students appeared to be much more engaged in the read aloud, searching for connections to share based on what was being read.

I further observed students carrying over strategy instruction from reading and applying it to social studies and science (Research Journal, 6/1/11). For example, I observed six students at various times making predictions with classmates during social studies group
work. Once one student stopped to make a prediction, his peers would join in. By the end of class the group had gone through the entire assignment making predictions on their own accord and discussing whether or not their predictions came true, which indicated to me that my students were taking a more active role in their learning and were reflecting upon the content they had read and their predictions.

During a science lesson, three students made connections while reading about animal habitats. I observed the students writing their connections on post-its and sticking them in their books, which they shared with me at the end of class (see Figure 4.14), (Research Journal, 5/18/11).

**Figure 4.14: Student Work Sample using Connecting Strategy in Science**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-T-W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My grandma's pond has a lot of frogs in it. We see them when they are baby tadpoles and then they grow into big frogs. This is their home for their whole life just like in our book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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During the student focus group interview, the use of strategies was brought up by students a number of times (6/15/11). They reflected upon the lessons in which they learned the strategies as well as their own individual use of different strategies during independent reading. This demonstrates the students understanding and willingness to use the strategies as a tool for reading expository text (see Figure 4.15).

Statement seven on the student survey stated: I know different metacognitive strategies that I can use when reading a nonfiction book that will help me to understand what I read. I gave the survey twice, once at the start of the study and again at the end. Though both surveys were identical, there was a huge shift in responses between the first and second survey, suggesting an increase in students’ awareness of metacognitive strategies and their uses (see Figure 4.16).

Figure 4.15: Focus Group Interview Statements Regarding Strategy Use

Jason: “When I um... learned picturing it makes me enjoy the book better because I could smell the ash burning or taste things.”

Ben: “I like to do connections. I really like text to self because when I
read now I can look in my brain and think about how I've done this before or that I've read this same thing before in social studies. Like with the American Revolution.”

Dylan: “...I feel like I can read more books that have facts in them. I use connecting a lot because it helps me enjoy the story better...”

Erin: “I've always read a lot of nonfiction but when I was younger I'd just like read half of it and throw it on my bed and forget about it. But um now I'll be home and I'll be reading and I'll put my book down and try to picture what I read in my head. I think it's kind of fun to do.”

Mary: “Um... well sometimes when I read social studies I try to picture in my head what I read because a lot of the stuff we read I have never seen before so I like to pretend in my head what it looks like.

Figure 4.16: Student Responses to Survey Statement Seven

![Responses to Survey Statement Seven](chart.png)
Student Understanding and Engagement While Reading Expository Text

When analyzing the different sources of data, I noticed another common trend. In the focus group interview students described themselves as having a better understanding of what they read when they use the metacognitive strategies. I believe this is partly due to the fact that in order for a student to successfully use a strategy a certain amount of focus is necessary. In my observations I noticed students reading intently, focusing on the text they were reading (Research Journal, 6/14/11).

I also noticed a shift in the students’ thinking regarding traits of a good reader. The school district in which the study took place put great emphasis on a student’s ability to read quickly. Assessments such as Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Good & Kaminski, 2005) are used to monitor a student’s fluency and record the number of words the student can read in one minute. Knowing this, many of my students focused their attention on reading quickly rather than reading for meaning. However, learning the metacognitive
strategies illustrated a shift in their thinking regarding the value in reading quickly over understanding what is read. Figure 4.18 and 4.19 illustrate the change in students' reading perception.

Figure 4.17: Survey Statements 5 & 6

Survey Statement 5: A good reader is someone who reads very quickly and makes few mistakes, but may not always understand what they read.

Survey Statement 6: A good reader is someone who reads not too fast but not too slow, and thinks carefully about what they are reading.

Figure 4.18: Survey Responses to Statement 5

![Responses to Survey Statement 5](image)
Through the conversations with students during the focus group interview I was able to conclude that they felt as though they were able to understand what they read better, and were able to focus on a type of text (expository) that typically disinterested them. The three metacognitive strategies seemed especially useful to my struggling readers, as it gave them a reason to read and a means to focus (Research Journal, 6/14/11). One struggling reader, Dylan describes his experience in Figure 4.20 below.
Miss Klein: Do you feel like you understand what you read better when you pay attention to metacognitive strategies like picture and connecting?
Dylan: Yeah I do because the strategies really help make my brain focus.
Dylan: Um... it makes me like... um... like it [expository texts] more. I think it helps me to find out what the stuff I'm reading is about.
Mary: it like gets me more interested now because I can understand them [expository texts] better.
Mary: I feel like I can really get more out of the book and understand it better too. I feel like I can focus and concentrate better.

My students also described themselves as feeling more interested in expository texts when using a metacognitive strategy (6/15/11). This was an important shift in thinking and relates directly to my research questions. In my research journal (6/1/11), I noted...

...They seem to be paying more attention to the text titles and pictures now, and were able to recall what they had read very easily when asked, and ...usually when they choose a nonfiction book they quickly flip through and
look at the pictures. Now I’m noticing they are reading (expository texts) for longer periods of time.

The students themselves described their engagement experiences in the focus group interview highlighted in Figure 4.21.

Figure 4.21: Focus Group Responses Regarding Engagement

| Jason: ...The [strategies] bring you into the book. Even a nonfiction book, which is usually kind of boring to me. |
| Jamie: ...I just feel like if I use a strategy I pay attention more to what I’m reading and then I can remember it when we talk about it. |
| Dylan:  I know I pay attention more now. I use the strategies and it makes it so that I don’t just try a book quick and put it away. I read the books now and don’t just put them back so quick because I get bored with them. |
| Mary: ...It’s when you’re like really paying attention to what you’re reading and like it’s really hard for you to get distracted. |

Book Choice

While my classroom library consists of a wide variety of books, including both fiction and nonfiction, I have noticed that year after year my students tend to veer more towards the fiction section. The data from the student focus group interview, student surveys, observation notes, and research journal suggests that teaching
metacognitive strategies may influence students' book choice, actually increasing the amount of nonfiction texts they choose to read.

The student surveys that I gave at the beginning and end of the study included two statements that related to book choice:

1. When I choose a book to read on my own, I usually choose one that is a fictional story instead of nonfiction.

2. Reading nonfiction is not as important as reading fiction, because most people do not read nonfiction texts (books, magazines, etc.) unless they are in school.

Not surprisingly, the majority of the class (11 of 21 students) agreed with this statement prior to the study. However, by the end of the study when I gave the second survey the results were slightly more balanced with 8 students who agreed, 8 who disagreed, and 5 who did not know, as represented in figure 4.22 and 4.23. I believe that this change is a direct result of not only learning how to use the three metacognitive strategies, but also an increased exposure to expository texts. I believe that teaching the strategies to my students may have made the expository texts less intimidating to them, therefore increasing their willingness and desire to read such texts.
Figure 4.22: Survey Responses to Statement 1

Responses to Survey Statement 1

Figure 4.23: Survey Response to Statement 2

Responses to Survey Statement 2
In my Research Journal entry for week three (5/25/11), I noted that my students were choosing more expository text during independent reading time. In an entry for week four (6/1/11), I noted that my students continued to choose expository text in the classroom. I also wrote about a conversation with the school librarian in which she mentioned that many of my students had been taking out more nonfiction reading materials from our school library (Research Journal, 6/14/11). This further shows that my students were beginning to independently select expository texts on their own following specific metacognitive strategy instruction.

The students’ comments during the focus group interview also shed some light on their choices of books following strategy instruction. When I posed the question “Do you ever choose expository texts on your own during independent reading time?” the students’ answers linked to the trends I observed in my notes in my research journal and the students’ survey responses, suggesting that the implementation of metacognitive reading strategies may increase the amount of expository text my students select (see Figure 4.24).
Figure 4.24: Focus Group Responses Regarding Book Choice

Dylan: Yeah I really like to read the *Giant Book of Questions* book. It was there all year but now I try to read it a lot because I like to read the stuff about animals.

Mary: Yes I do because they are very interesting and you shouldn’t always read fiction. Like, you can, you can read it but you should read nonfiction too. It can be fun too.

Erin: I would rather have nonfiction instead of fiction because when you’re reading fiction you can’t really pick up as much information.

Ben: Um... I read nonfiction on my own a lot more now because I like to read about sports and I can read about sports when I read nonfiction books. That’s just what I like to do.

Jamie: Yes especially like about tornadoes and stuff. I read it at home in the newspaper and now I like to read about nature and storms and stuff. We have a lot of books in here that tell about that stuff and now I want to read more and more about it all.

Jason: Sometimes. Like again, it depends on the mood that I’m in. If I’ve been crazy all day long like thinking about things I’m going to want to read fiction. But if I’m out of zonk and just like asleep in class I’m going to want nonfiction.

Conclusion

I believe the findings from this study reveal a successful learning experience for both my students and me. The findings illustrate the many ways my instruction of the three metacognitive reading
strategies positively influenced my students’ reading development. The experience stimulated active involvement and thinking by students while reading a number of different types of expository texts. The students learned to make connections to informational texts, create images in their mind while reading, and develop prediction as they read. All three strategies invited my students to become active, engaged readers.

Students took ownership of the strategies and used them independently by choice. I perceived that they felt more confident in reading expository texts and were able to recall information more readily. The experiences also helped me introduce them to a variety of informational texts. Many students developed a sincere interest in reading informational text, a huge shift in comparison to their book choices prior to the study.

I believe that my students benefited from being exposed to and working with expository texts. I further believe that teaching students how to use metacognitive reading strategies while reading expository texts was highly beneficial. In a period of six short weeks my students went from rarely ever reading informational texts to becoming active,
involved readers of expository texts. In the future I plan to continue using metacognitive strategies in my reading instruction.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

For this study I examined the ways in which my instruction of three metacognitive reading strategies, connecting, imaging, and predicting, influenced my students' reading of expository texts. I wanted to see if and how teaching the three strategies would impact students' abilities to read expository texts strategically. My research question was: How does my instruction of specific metacognitive strategies influence my fourth graders' reading of expository text?

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions I have made based on my research findings, as well as implications for student learning, implications for my teaching, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

From my analysis of my research data, I developed four major conclusions.

Explicit Instruction of the Connecting Metacognitive Strategy May Increase Students’ Engagement in Text
In analyzing the data I concluded that my students’ use of the Connecting strategy helped them become more engaged while reading different forms of expository text. In looking at the student work samples, I see that students were making meaningful connections from their past experiences, which showed that they were actively thinking about what they were reading. The strategy facilitated the students’ deeper thinking of the text and kept them focused on the content of what they were reading. In the focus group interview, students discussed how using the strategies while reading helped them to focus better and enjoy expository texts more. At one point during the focus interview one student discussed a connection he made from the text to what he had read about the American Revolution in social studies. This demonstrates the usefulness of the connecting strategy across content areas. The focus group interview participants further discussed how using the Connecting strategy helped them pay more attention while reading and then remember what they read. One student explained that using the Connecting strategy helped him “enjoy the story better” when reading from an expository text.
Explicit Instruction of the Imaging and Predicting Strategies May Influence Students' Independent Strategy Use

In my data analysis, I noticed students transferring what they learned in strategy instruction to their own independent reading. My students often asked for paper to draw what they had read in an expository text, and were able to describe their images to their peers. I believe this demonstrates the students' ability and willingness to use the strategies to help further their thinking while reading independently. They seemed to recognize the value of the strategy and how they could use it across reading activities and experiences.

In the focus group interview, one student described how she used the Imaging strategy during social studies because it helped her picture what she was reading. She explained that many times she is unfamiliar with the social studies content, so taking the time to stop and picture it in her mind helps her to make sense of what she is reading.

In my observations, I noted students discussing and making predictions with their peers during class group work. The students decided on their own to make predictions while working on the group
assignment. By the end of the class period, they had read through the entire selection making predictions, checking their predictions and discussing their thoughts. Their implementation of the Predicting strategy into their independent use demonstrates their ability to take ownership of it.

The Explicit Instruction of the Three Metacognitive Strategies Connecting, Imaging, and Predicting Along with Students' Independent Strategy Use, Enhanced Their Comprehension of Expository Texts

Explicitly teaching my students how to use the three metacognitive strategies of connecting, imaging, and predicting enhanced their comprehension of expository texts, as evidenced by my findings. My students were more engaged in the texts while using the strategies and chose to use the strategies independently after strategy instruction. The findings show that all twenty-one of my students chose to use at least one of the strategies independently without prompting. I believe that this demonstrates the students' understanding of strategy use as well. If my students did not
understand how or when to use the different strategies I doubt they would have chosen to use them independently. My students’ willingness to use the strategy by their own choice leads me to believe that they found the strategy to be a helpful, effective tool to use when reading.

The findings from this study also demonstrate how the instruction of metacognitive reading strategies affects the engagement, comprehension, and self-efficacy of students. In my observations I noted students reading intently, focusing on the text they were reading. Using the strategies required the students to really think about what they were reading, therefore enhancing their comprehension. Experts (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007; Eilers & Pinkley, 2006; Michalsky, Mevarech, & Haibi, 2009) agree that the use of metacognitive strategies benefit students in a number of ways, including comprehension.

In the past many of my students struggled while reading informational text, especially if it did not include colorful pictures. After teaching the strategies to my students, I noticed that they became more engaged while reading informational text because they
were focusing on using the strategies. I believe that being active, engaged readers enhanced their understanding of what they read, benefiting them as learners.

The strategies were especially useful to many of my readers who were struggling and often had greater difficulty reading informational text due to the large mass of information and tier three words. Using the strategies helped the students to focus on the reading and attempt to make sense of what they read, as described by a reader who struggles during the focus group interview.

During the focus group interview and student survey responses, students demonstrated a shift in thinking regarding their sentiments on reading expository text. The responses to the focus group interview questions show that my students felt more comfortable reading expository text after having learned the strategies and being exposed more to the different informational text forms. I noted in my research journal that the students were beginning to read more expository texts and for longer periods of time, I believe this was due to the implementation of the metacognitive strategies as well as the increase in exposure to expository texts.
Instruction of Metacognitive Reading Strategies While Reading Expository Texts May Influence the Type of Books Students Choose to Read Independently

In analyzing the study’s data, I noticed a shift in student book selection. The students’ responses to the survey questions showed an increase in reading nonfiction texts as opposed to fiction from the start of the study. Entries in my Research Journal also demonstrated the shift, noting that students were choosing more expository texts to read during independent reading time. The school librarian also noticed that many of my students were beginning to select more informational books for their weekly library book selection. I am able to deduce that teaching my students how to read expository texts metacognitively increased their desire to read informational texts on their own. The students’ responses during the focus group interview further support this claim as students described their experiences reading expository texts after learning the strategies. Philbrick (2009) found similar results in her study, suggesting that students who learned to use metacognitive strategies while reading nonfiction text in a number of
contexts showed improved confidence in their ability to read nonfiction texts.

Implications for Student Learning

Instruction of Metacognitive Reading Strategies May Increase Students’ Focus While Reading Expository Texts

From teaching the connecting, imaging, and predicting strategies to my students I am able to deduce that they are now able to focus better when given the tools to do so. Prior to this study, many of my students struggled with reading expository texts. I believe that the finding of this study demonstrates the effectiveness of the strategies in helping students to focus in on their reading.

Through my instruction of the predicting strategy my students learned how to use clues from titles, subtitles, pictures, and charts to make quality predictions on what they would be reading. My students used this strategy independently during different reading opportunities to help them focus on what they read. I observed my students reading intently with purpose, using the connecting and imaging strategy as tools to do so. Student themselves discussed how using the
strategies helped them to focus and concentrate on what they read in the focus group interview.

Students' Comprehension of Expository Text May be Enhanced When Using the Connecting, Imaging, and Predicting Strategies

As I have previously noted, my students became more engaged in their reading when using the metacognitive strategies. As a result of being more engaged, I believe my students comprehended more of what they read. Their use of the connecting, imaging, and predicting strategies helped my students to become more active, meaning making readers. Their use of the strategies gave them a purpose to read and kept them actively thinking about their understanding.

When making connections, students were required to think about what they read in the expository text and connect it to something they already knew, therefore enhancing their comprehension. In creating images, students used their senses to make sense of something they may had never seen or experienced before, further enhancing their comprehension. In making predictions,
students looked for clues regarding what they would read, getting their minds read to think and process what was to be read, further enhancing comprehension. I believe that the strategies provide useful tools for my students' learning and helped them to make sense of texts that they may have struggled with had they not learned the strategies.

Students' Use of the Metacognitive Reading Strategies May Influence Student Book Selection and Increase Number of Expository Texts Read

The findings from my study suggest that when students learn how to connect, image, and predict expository texts, they broaden their text selection, increasing the number of expository texts they choose to read. I found through my research that my students seemingly felt more comfortable reading expository texts after learning the strategies. Best, Floyd, and McNamara (2008) recommend teaching students reading strategies when reading expository texts. I believe that the strategies made expository texts less intimidating and instead more interesting and enjoyable to them. I believe that reading
a variety of different forms of texts was beneficial to my students, and I was pleased to see them choosing more expository texts on their own. The findings imply that my students are more willing to try expository texts when equipped with knowledge of metacognitive strategies.

Implications for My Teaching

Teaching the Strategies of Connecting, Imaging, and Predicting Enhances Students’ Comprehension of Expository Texts

The findings from this study demonstrate the usefulness of the metacognitive reading strategies of connecting, imaging, and predicting in increasing student comprehension while reading expository texts. In teaching the strategies, I essentially provided students with tools they could use to help themselves make sense of informational text. In the past, my students have struggled with different forms of expository texts. The sophisticated language and complex topics were often difficult for my students to make sense of.
However, when I first implemented the strategy instruction I saw an improvement in my students' reading abilities and their levels of motivation and engagement. They understand that when they read they must pay attention to the text and try to always make meaning of it. The strategies facilitate this type of reading and helped me to be a more effective teacher. In the future, I will continue to teach my students to use the three metacognitive strategies, along with other metacognitive strategies, in order to enhance their comprehension.

My Students Can be Challenged to Read Different Forms of Texts When Equipped with the Strategies of Connecting, Imaging, and Predicting

I found that my students were capable and willing to branch out and reading different types of expository texts after I taught them the three different metacognitive strategies. As the responses to the student survey and focus group interview illustrate, prior to strategy instruction the majority of my students preferred reading fictional texts, finding expository to be challenging and uninteresting. After learning the connecting, imaging, and predicting strategies my
students began to try different forms of expository texts in their independent reading time. Not only did they choose expository texts to read from our classroom library, but also from our school library. I saw more students reading expository texts this year than any of my previous years teaching, and I believe this is because of my instruction of the three metacognitive strategies. I will continue to teach the three metacognitive strategies to my future students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Similar Study Using Different Metacognitive Strategies

In this study I chose only to use three metacognitive strategies: connecting, imaging, and predicting. For future research I would suggest selecting other metacognitive strategies, such as inferring and synthesizing. I would be interested in seeing how implementing different metacognitive strategies might influence students’ reading comprehension and text selection.
Similar Study But with Younger Participants

My study involved students in fourth grade. I observed a number of changes in my students' reading abilities and comprehension of texts after implementing the three metacognitive strategies. Furthermore, the findings of the study show an increase in expository texts read by my students. I recommend that future researchers create a similar study, but one where the participants are younger than fourth grade. Duke (2010) supports this notion, suggesting more exposure of expository texts to younger students. I would be interested to see how first or second graders respond to expository texts and metacognitive strategy instruction.

Investigate How the Use of Metacognitive Strategies Influences Learning in the Content Areas

In this study I examined the influence my metacognitive strategy instruction had on my students' reading of expository text. In my research I observed my students transferring their knowledge from the strategy instruction during our reading block over to social studies and science. I believe this natural transfer of knowledge that took place in
my classroom would be an interesting study and should be explored more fully.

Final Thoughts

My study aimed to find how the use of the metacognitive strategies, connecting, imaging, and predicting influenced my students’ reading of expository text. I found that the strategy instruction increased my students’ comprehension, broadened their text selections, and helped them to become more active, engaged readers. Not only did conducting the study benefit my students, it helped me become a better teacher.

At the start of this study, I was concerned by my students disinterest in reading social studies related texts. Their inability to connect to the reading and express their thoughts concerned me. I had hoped that there was some way I could perhaps bridge the gap. Now, at the end of the study, I find my students making connections to not only social studies related material, but other forms of informational text. So what changed? How did my students become more engaged, thoughtful readers in a period of six weeks? I believe it...
was through the careful planning and explicit instruction of
metacognitive strategies. Teaching my students how to read
metacognitively using the Connecting, Imaging, and Predicting
strategies, has changed my students’ reading of expository text, and
has shown me how explicit instruction can improve my teaching and
my students’ learning.

From conducting this study, I take away the importance of
equipping my students with tools to read challenging texts. Studies
show a relative lack of expository text in elementary classrooms (Greg
strategy instruction in reading when working with different forms of
text (Duke, 2004). In my future teaching I will continue to instruct
my students in the use the metacognitive strategies used in this study,
and will encourage my students to continue reading different forms of
expository texts. This study shows that fourth grade is not too early
of a grade to have students work with expository texts. Rather, it is
the ideal grade to teach students how to become meaningful readers
of expository text, and at the same time, find enjoyment in reading
different forms of informational texts.
References


Appendix A: Observation Field Notes

Setting:
Observer:
Time:
Length of Observation:
Date: ____________

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<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
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Appendix B: Student Survey

Please read the statements below and put a checkmark next to the answer you agree with.

1. When I choose a book to read on my own, I usually choose one that is a fictional story instead of nonfiction.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know

2. Reading nonfiction is not as important as reading fiction, because most people do not read nonfiction texts (books, magazines, etc.) unless they are in school.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know

3. It is important to think about the story when I am reading it.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know

4. When I read a nonfiction book such as a magazine article or textbook, I usually am reading it because my teacher asked me to, not because I am interested.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know

5. A good reader is someone who reads very quickly and makes few mistakes, but may not always understand what they read.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know

6. A good reader is someone who reads not too fast but not too slow, and thinks carefully about what they are reading.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know

7. I know different metacognitive strategies that I can use when reading a nonfiction book that will help me to understand what I read.
   ─────── Agree
   ─────── Disagree
   ─────── Don’t know
Appendix C: Student Focus Group Interview Questions

Students __________________________ Date

1. How do you feel about reading?

2. What is your favorite type of book or story to read? Why is it your favorite?

3. How do you feel about reading nonfiction texts after learning the four metacognitive reading strategies?

4. Do you feel like you understand what you read better when you use the metacognitive strategies? Why?

5. How has the reading of nonfiction texts changed for you since learning the metacognitive strategies?

6. Do you ever choose to read nonfiction texts during independent reading time?
7. Do you read more often now that you have learned strategies to help with this type of reading?

8. When you are reading a textbook, magazine, or newspaper, what do you think about?

9. What does it mean to be actively engaged/thinking during reading?

10. Do you feel like you are a better reader now that you have learned the strategies? Why?

11. When do you think you will come across nonfiction texts outside of school?

12. Do you think you could use the strategies outside of school?

13. If you were given the ability to be a fast reader who never makes mistakes, or the ability to read at a moderate pace but always understand what you read, which would you choose? Why?
Appendix D: I’m Connected Organizer

I’m Connected

Name: ______________________ Date: ______________

Text: _____________________________________________

I can make a connection between something I read and:

✓ Something in my own life
✓ Something in another book
✓ Something in the world today

Here is what I read:

____________________________________________________

Here is my connection:

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

Here is how my connection helped me understand this text better:

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

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Appendix E: Picture This Worksheet

Name: _____________________ Date: _____________________

Text: ______________________________________________

I have a good picture of this sentence in my mind:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

I have a good picture of this sentence in my mind:

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix F: Reading With All of My Senses
Worksheet

Name: _____________________ Date: ______________

Text: ____________________________________________

When I read this text or looked at this picture, here’s what I experienced:

I saw ________________________________ and it looked like __________________________________________________________.

I heard ________________________________ and it sounded like __________________________________________________________.

I smelled ________________________________ and it smelled like __________________________________________________________.

I tasted ________________________________ and it tasted like __________________________________________________________.

I touched ________________________________ and it felt like __________________________________________________________.

It touched my heart and I felt ________________________________ because __________________________________________________________.

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Appendix G: Predictions Worksheet

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Read through student assent and took signatures. I administered the student survey. Today we talked a lot about expository texts and what it means. At first my students were not sure. I asked them to give it a shot, and a few volunteered some potential definitions. One student thought it might have to do with plays, or Readers Theater. Another student thought it might have to do with writing explanations. One explanation that I was surprised by was when one student said that they think it means to “expose” people (playing off of the root of the word). The student further explained that expository texts meant to expose people to “the truth,” or whatever it was they were reading about. What a great thought!

We then talked about examples of different expository texts. After I showed the students a few samples from our own classroom library they were quickly able to list dozens more. Some students even thought of texts that I had not, such as job applications and brochures. There was some confusion when it came to books that
were part fiction, part nonfiction (such as American Girl books). We discussed which parts of the book could be considered expository and that seemed to clear things up.

Week 2 5/18/11

This week I introduced the first strategy, connecting. I explained why good readers try to connect to what they read and how learning to do so will help them to not only remember more of what they read but enjoy their reading more as well. When I first introduced the concept, most of my students couldn’t quite figure out how connecting related to reading. However, a newer student from a different school must have had instruction on the strategies because she was familiar with most of what I was introducing. We talked about the different types of connections, text to text, text to self, and text to world. I then modeled how to make a connection for each type using think alouds. Afterwards I demonstrated using a sticky note to keep track of my connection and then let the students give it a try using a book of their choice. Being their first time using the strategy, most of my students made very general connections. However a few
made some pretty significant connections, which really surprised me. Later in the day when we were reading *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* together I was happy to see some of my students raise their hand to share a connection with what they read to what we have learned in social studies. They seemed to be excited to use the strategy and I was excited to see them focusing in on what they were reading and really thinking. I’ve noticed many students using the sticky notes during independent reading time. Some have left their connections on my desk for me to read.

Week 3 5/25/11

This week I introduced the picturing strategy. We talked about using the descriptions the author gives to picture what you read in your mind. The students seemed to really enjoy this. We went over the five senses, and how you should use these to help you make a mental image. To teach this I used an expository text about Pompeii. I really feel like it was the perfect text to use because it allowed the children to really practice making a picture in their head. I feel like the lesson
went well overall and the children were able to describe to me what they were seeing in their mind.

What I find difficult about teaching this to the kids was that there really isn’t any way for me to really be able to tell if they are successfully picturing what they read. For one of the student samples I asked the children to draw what they were able to picture, and that seemed to show that many of them were able to picture what they were reading. As the week goes on I will continue to remind them to practice picturing in their head while reading expository text. It is interesting to note that my students have been asking me for paper so that they can draw what they are picturing in their mind during independent reading.

Week 4 6/1/11

This week I introduced the predicting strategy. We talked about how we know to make predictions using a narrative text, but what about expository? The kids were really unsure of how to do this- which worked perfectly for the lesson. We talked about predicting before,
during, and after. I demonstrated how to use pictures, titles, subtitles, etc. to make predictions of an expository text.

The students seemed to catch on to this pretty quickly, although struggled a bit at first. They began practicing making predictions of their own using an expository text of the choice. They caught on to the before predictions but had difficulty figuring out how to predict during. I modeled how to make predictions during reading and then worked with my students making predictions during reading before letting them try it once more independently. Afterwards they seemed to understand better. One student described the predicting strategy as “getting my brain ready for the book.”

As I walked around during independent reading I noticed that they seemed to be paying more attention to the text titles and pictures and were able to recall what they had read very easily when asked. The students were examining the books before reading and thinking about what the text might be about.

I have been noticing student using the strategies in science and social studies class this week. During a social studies group work period six students started using the three strategies while reading
with their group members. One student started a discussion on predicting and then they all joined in. At the end they were checking to see if their predictions came true. In science the students were making connections between their own experiences and the habitats of the animals we were studying. Many of them asked for post-its to use for the connection recording.

Week 5 6/8/11

This week I had the students independently practice using the different metacognitive strategies taught. They were able to remember very well what each strategy was and when it should be used. There were a few students who had difficulty with the predicting strategy. I developed a worksheet graphic organizer to help them organize their thoughts for making predictions.

I noticed that while most of the students were using all three of the strategies during independent reading time, there were a few students who kept using the same strategy. I encouraged these students to try using a different strategy, which many of them did. One student kept using the connecting strategy again and again. I
talked to him about the different strategies to help refresh his memory. I encouraged him to try a different strategy. He chose the imaging and came up with a good descriptive image.

During DEAR time my students are allowed to choose any book they would like to read. I was interested to find that many of my students chose expository texts- and practiced using the strategies! My students have been using the Imaging strategy during independent reading. I observed 16 students illustrating their images, and 9 of the 16 using the connections sheet on their own. 3 of the students used only the imaging sheet and 2 used only the five senses. I found this to be surprising and exciting. It’s not that my students don’t like to look at nonfiction texts- they do. It’s just that usually when they choose a nonfiction book they quickly flip through it looking at the pictures and then put it back to choose another. Now I am noticing my students not only choosing more expository texts but actually reading them for longer periods of time.
Week 6 6/14/11

I am having my students continue practicing metacognitive strategies. I’ve been pairing them up with a partner to read the same expository story. As I observe their interactions I notice that they are speaking to each other about which strategy they used and why they used it. I was happy to see my struggling readers were able to express their reasoning behind certain strategies. I feel like they especially value the strategies and have been using them often, though they do still need support with predicting. The students continue to choose expository texts from our classroom library. The librarian has noticed that the children have been taking out more expository texts from our school library as well. As I continue to observe the students I notice that they are using the strategies I’ve taught. All 21 of my students are using the strategies independently at this point. I tallied their use of the strategies: Connecting 48 times, Imaging 29 times, Predicting 23 times.

Today I observed a conversation between two students regarding picturing in their mind what they were reading as the page
had no pictures on it. These students are struggling readers, so I was very happy to see them successfully using the strategies.