

Spring 5-17-2017

# How to Support Students in Reading for Meaning

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How to Support Students in Reading for Meaning

by

Gabrielle S. Dzikowicz Miller

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education of the College at Brockport, State University  
of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Literacy

May 2017

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### Abstract

This research explores how to support students in reading for meaning. The purpose of my research was to learn more about how to help students read for meaning and to provide the skills and strategies necessary to support reading for meaning. Further, this research reviews the impact strategies have as a means for comprehension of the text. Data were collected for this study over a four-week period in the form of semi-structured interviews, student artifacts, observations, audio recordings, and field notes. Data were analyzed to determine the most effective ways that students were able to read for meaning.

## Introduction

Why is reading such a struggle for some students? This is a question that enters my head often as I spend the day within the classroom. Most people claim reading is a relaxing enjoyable activity. I have learned that reading opens doors to adventures and faraway places you cannot even imagine, that is, until you entered and read someone else's words. What if you are reading someone else's words and not understanding a thing they are saying? Would it be as if you were in a different country and unable to communicate? Would it be frustrating? Would you continue on, even if you were unsure of what was being said? Would you feel that the information had a purpose? It is no wonder some students strongly dislike reading. The students may be completely confused and not have any idea of what they are reading, or even why they are reading. This is a tremendous issue in classrooms today.

These questions allowed me to begin wondering about the reading process. I wondered what a student sees when they read a text. Do they understand that all of the words put together create a whole different meaning, than just the words independently? I wondered if people actually heard (or listened to) themselves reading. I needed to find a way to help my students understand that reading is one way we learn. The words in the text are put together for a reason—to form an understanding, and that our purpose is to read for meaning.

I have such a strong passion for reading. As I sat in the classroom, at the back kidney table, listening to a student attempting to complete another running record assessment, I began to wonder 'what I am listening to?' I scanned the text for what was being read; making sure I had the correct recording sheet and just felt...lost. I wondered if this is how my student felt as she "read" the text. Esmeralda (pseudonym) in particular was combining lines, making up words,

skipping entire pages, and seemed .... lost. These questions and my concern for my students, influenced the topic of my research project. I wanted to find ways to support students to read for meaning.

### **Topic and Research Problem**

The purpose of this research project is to learn why students may not be reading for meaning and to develop methods that I can use to support these students. Reading comprehension is the skill all students have to know (Kocaarslan, 2016). Many of the students are reading words from the text, however do not appear to comprehend the information they are reading. I have noticed many of the students are not paying attention to punctuation as well. This is another imperative part of the reading process as it influences comprehension. Students may read the printed words without paying attention to conventions. Some students read as many words as they can, as quickly as they can, in one deep breath at a time. This rapid method of reading potentially appears to preventing the students from obtaining meaning from the texts they are reading.

My primary intention is to teach the students how to read for meaning and improve their comprehension and appreciation for reading in general.

### **Rationale**

My research project addresses how to support students in reading for meaning. This project is important because students need to understand what they are reading. Reading comprehension is one of the most important aspects of reading (Kocaarslan, 2016).

Students need to utilize strategies and skills to understand the reading process. As Kucer (2016) stated, “instructional strategies that too often expect readers to focus on text-based meanings alone may risk producing readers who passively interact with text in a surface level, literal manner” (p. 28).

### **Purpose for the Research**

The purpose of the research project is to understand how to support students in reading for meaning. Furthermore, it is to provide students with skills and strategies necessary to read for meaning. Comprehension has been repeatedly studied and verified to be an essential part of the reading and learning process (Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Barkley, 2009, Kucer, 2106, Kocaarslan, 2016; and Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2010). This research explored ways to assist students by teaching them how to break down a text, pay attention to conventions, annotate and make multiple designated comprehension stops while reading. These strategies allow the students to comprehend the meaning behind the words as well as connect the words to make meaning of the text.

### **Research Questions**

Why do some students struggle with reading comprehension?

What strategies can I provide students that struggle with reading for meaning?

In what ways can I support students in developing deeper level thinking while reading?



## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The following literature review supports focal areas that are addressed within this study. The review examined the areas of comprehension, reading strategies, and motivation in relation to students reading for meaning. Research within the three selected areas of the reading process is a key component to support students' reading comprehension.

### **Comprehension**

Comprehension is the process of constructing and extracting meaning, while interacting with a text utilizing prior knowledge, previous experiences, general understanding, the information from the text, and the way this information is synthesized (Pardo, 2004).

Comprehension has been repeatedly studied and verified to be an essential part of the reading and learning process (Dooley & Matthews, 2009; Carlson, Seipel, & McMaster, 2014; Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Barkley, 2009; Kucer, 2106; Kocaarslan, 2016; and Logan, Medford, & Hughes, 2010). Dooley states (2011), "Comprehension ... is a particularly important topic given children's developmental path toward becoming literate" (p. 169). If you cannot understand what you are reading or what is being read to you, how can you construct any meaning? According to Mason (2004), as cited in Kocaarslan (2016), reading comprehension is a fundamental part of life-long learning. Students need to be able to understand what they are reading, make meaning, as well as connections, in order to comprehend the information.

A key component of comprehension consists of making connections with the words on the paper. Harvey and Goudvis (2007) state that, "comprehension means that readers think not only about what they are reading but about what they are learning. When readers construct meaning, they are building their store of knowledge" (p.15). Meaning mostly is constructed in

the form of connections. The connections can be one or multiple combinations of the following; text-to-text (meaning the text relates to another text previously read), text-to-self (meaning the text relates to something of importance to the reader), or text-to-world (meaning the text relates to issues that an individual can relate to in “their” world). Making the connections, allows the reader to “go beyond the information given” (Kucer, 2016, p. 28). This allows the reader to make connections with the words on the page and gives the text meaning to the reader. Making connections is imperative for reading comprehension, and I work on this with my students daily.

Further stated by Kucer (2016), “...student comprehension of text frequently differs from what is written” (p. 22). This is an issue in consideration to reading comprehension. It is important to have a deeper level understanding, however, if students are unable to comprehend the information at the surface level, their further understanding is most likely not going to be precise or relevant. As researcher Louise Rosenblatt states (2005) “literature provides a living through, not simply knowledge about” (p. 63). This is when the students are making necessary connections with the text, as well activating their prior background knowledge for significant meaning of the text.

Thoroughly stated by Carlson et al., (2014), “reading comprehension is a complex and multidimensional construct” (p. 40). Reading comprehension is not simply a verbatim retelling of exactly what was read. Comprehension is the understanding of the information along with the connections and deeper level thinking that is necessary for retaining information. A way to increase comprehension in students’ reading abilities is through the use of various strategies.

### **Strategies**

Students need to be able to utilize a combination of reading strategies. If one is not successful, he/she needs to be able to rely on another learned method to find the meaning of a

text. An additional goal of this study was to work together with the students to teach them a variety of strategies. This is supported by the research of Keiffer and Lesaux (2007) the researchers suggest, “by examining what strategies average and above average word learners use regularly, differentiating them from below average word learners, one may be able to identify the tools that could help move all students forward in their vocabulary and comprehension” (p.136).

There are multiple strategies that can and should be utilized during reading to improve students’ comprehension. Strategies such as repeated readings, think aloud, graphic organizers, partner readings, retellings, close readings, annotations, and decoding are a few that, when utilized efficiently, improve student comprehension of texts.

### **Think aloud**

Think aloud is an interactive process. This is when a teacher shares his/her cognitive thinking process aloud to support and scaffold reading comprehension strategies to the students. Examples of when think aloud is utilized are when strategies such as inferencing, summarizing, retelling, and connections are to be made.

The think aloud strategy is developed and modified further within the works of Kuhn et al. (2014) with the partner reading strategy utilized during the think aloud in their study. The lower skilled students were partnered with high skilled students and they were to read aloud one page at a time. The students then worked through the text together. This allowed the students to coach each other, while learning together. Students tend to be more comfortable and will at times work easier with fellow students. Perhaps it is a less intimidating situation for them. This strategy can be modified for the students to look for specific details, character traits or other information within the text.

Think aloud can also be used for discussing sections of the text as a verbal form of an annotation. Examples of think alouds are when: 1.) students reads from a text (or a section of a text) and then tell what they were thinking about while they were reading, 2.) discussion of the author's meaning, 3.) asking of any clarifying questions, or 4.) providing any connections (Raudenbush, 2017). Think aloud also can be a teacher modeling.

Think aloud is an effective strategy to promote increased comprehension. This allows students to break a text down into sections, with the intention to have a greater understanding. Carson et al. (2014) utilized the strategy of think aloud within their study. The participants were to read one sentence at a time aloud. Next, the students were to state what the sentence was about, regardless of how obvious the sentence appeared to be. This is a great strategy to teach students to think of the sentences as part of the whole and that each sentence has meaning and needs to be evaluated as such. Furthermore, as studied by D'Ardenne et al. (2013) the think aloud strategy is used as a way to specifically focus on the text structures and as a way to teach critical thinking. This study describes the strategy by beginning with the teacher modeling think aloud and then gradually releasing responsibility to the students.

### **Graphic Organizers**

A graphic organizer is a visual aid. It is utilized in all content areas to organize thoughts, view comparisons, as well as to aid in retaining information. It is a beneficial resource for teachers and an effective tool for students.

Graphic organizers are a way to categorize and arrange thoughts. They are utilized to aid in the understanding and comprehension of texts. "The brain is a natural pattern seeker and synthesizer and actively searches for patterns to categorized, organize, synthesize information, code it into memory, and then retrieve it" (Lyons, cited in Taberski, 2011, p. 209). The

utilization of graphic organizers for comprehension are addressed in multiple studies (Kieffer & Lesaux (2007); Kucer (2016); Kuhn, Rasinski, & Zimmerman (2014); Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Barkley (2009). These resources are further life-long strategies that can continually be developed and utilized throughout various subjects and for multiple grades throughout a student's schooling.

### **Decoding and Word Meaning**

A strategy readers use to understand and make sense of words within a text is decoding. Decoding also helps readers recognize words in and out of context. Furthermore, it is an essential skill that when utilized repeatedly will continue to develop through time.

Decoding is an imperative part of the reading process. Students need to understand the individual words, how they are made up (phonemes), as well as when they are grouped for comprehension of the text. Understanding basic word families contributes to the students' ability to decode additional words. Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, and Ciullo (2010), as cited in D'Ardenne et al. (2013) found that, "positive outcomes are most likely when educators provide explicit instruction in: (a) word study strategies to decode words, (b) word meanings and strategies for deriving the meanings of unknown words, and (c) comprehension strategy instruction" (p. 143). It is important that we teach our students a variety of strategies to utilize during reading. We need to teach the strategies, and give the students time to utilize the strategies before deciding if the strategy will or will not be effective. As stated in Spore & Schunemann (2014), reading strategies improved reading comprehension, which enhances reading motivation (p. 148).

### **Reading Motivation**

Motivation is "a willingness to engage in an activity and a willingness to persist in that activity, even when it becomes difficult" (Malloy et al., 2013, p. 273).

Personal connections are a strong motivator for a students' desire to read. In my present schooling experience, students seem to prefer non-fiction texts. As stated in D'Ardenne et al. (2013) students seem to be motivated and engaged with non-fiction books or books in which they have the ability to utilize resources that document or highlight areas of personal connections. The study by Kocaarslan (2016) further states that reading attitudes are a direct correlation to students' reading activity. If students enjoy a topic, they are more likely going to want to continue to read and learn. If it is something that is not of interest to students, they will begrudgingly struggle through it, at best. Students will never be interested in every topic teachers need to address in the classroom, however if it is made engaging, they will most likely have a different attitude. In the age of analytic reading Pennell, (2014) indicates that when students have a personal connection to a text, they are more likely to increase their comprehension. "The most rigorous reading is to find what those words on the page mean in our own lives" (p. 251).

Sporer & Schunemann (2014) further state that when students are able to monitor their own reading performance, the reading process is motivationally engaging for them. It is a form of ownership that drives them to want to read. As concluded by Logan, Medford, & Hughes (2011) when students have choice, are directly associated with the text, and the students are intrinsically driven, there is a higher level of motivation (p.125).

## **Conclusion**

Reading comprehension is an essential need for all individuals that read. There are multiple strategies that students can utilize to enhance their reading comprehension. Motivation is a key component in students' reading. The objective of this study is to learn about supporting students' reading for meaning. Along with verification of effective reading strategies to support readers and increasing student motivation and reading comprehension, students need to be

provided with the tools to be able to learn how to construct meaning and deepen their understandings of the text.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

I worked together with a small group of fourth grade students whose ages ranged from eight to ten years. The students were within a self-contained classroom and struggle with reading, especially reading for meaning. When readings are completed, the students are asked basic questions about the reading, and are often unable to answer them accurately, if at all. The students appeared to rely on pictures (if applicable) for comprehension questions, they read the words as printed (as if reading from a list) not with expression or for meaning or even accuracy. I was concerned about students' struggle to read for meaning.

Therefore, the intention of this research project is to work together with this small group of children to understand why students struggle in reading for meaning, as well as to discover which skills and strategies the students can utilize to obtain meaning while reading.

### **Participants**

The school district I am conducting the research project in is in a suburban area located in upstate New York. The following information was obtained from the school report card (2015): the district consists of approximately 3,500 students in K-12. Approximately 1,100 students receive free lunches, 300 receive reduced price lunches. The student demographics are varied and include Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, and Multi-Racial individuals. There are 460 Students with Disabilities, 1,500 economically challenged and 30 English Language Learners.

The students I worked together with are seven individuals from within the classified 460 Students with Disabilities from this school district. They were in a fourth grade classroom. There were two girls and five boys in this self-contained, Special Education classroom. All of the students have Individualized Education Programs. Each student required targeted support with the reading process as well as use of additional skill sets for reading comprehension.

### **Setting**

The research was conducted in a fourth grade classroom. The classroom was spacious and student work was displayed throughout the room. It was a typical classroom environment. There were text books on the bookshelves that were seldom utilized, there was a classroom library as well as numerous cabinets for storage. Each student had a personal desk area and access to an electronic device. There were eight tablets in the classroom for the students' independent use. There were three desktop computers in the classroom. There was a Smart Board in the classroom as well. This classroom had substantial, spacious areas for students to work. There were additional areas such as: a kidney table, a standing table, a round table, and a carpeted area for students to work without creating a disturbance in the learning of the other individuals.

### **Positionality**

I am a teacher, researcher, student, and a mother. I acknowledge that each of these characteristics allowed me to utilize a critical lens for my research project. I am a divorced, Caucasian, forty-two-year-old woman, and a mother to three teenage boys (a 14-year-old and twins that are 13 years old). I grew up in a large, middle class working family in a rural town in New Jersey. My father was the Human Resource Manager for a prominent life insurance company in New York City. My mother was a police dispatcher in the town where I grew up. I



have five sisters and two brothers, I am number seven of eight in the list of siblings. Two of my siblings are also teachers.

I graduated from The College at Brockport with a Bachelor's Degree in Childhood Inclusive Education. I received my initial New York State Teaching Certifications in Childhood Education and Special Education for grades 1-6. I currently am attending The College at Brockport working towards my Master's Degree in Literacy B-12.

### **Data Collection**

This is a qualitative case study focusing on how to support students who struggle with reading for meaning and ways to enhance students' reading comprehension skills. I collected the following data from the students, for this research project:

- **Semi-structured interviews:** were utilized to determine the reading attitude of the student.
- **Student artifacts:** included various examples of students' work.
- **Running records:** were utilized for reading accuracies and miscues. A running record is an assessment of a student's oral reading skills. It is a way to indicate areas where students are struggling or excelling. The miscues are ways of assessing students' reading behaviors and patterns. Upon completion of the reading, the students are further assessed on their reading comprehension, as well as a writing sample based on the text with a prompted question.
- **Discussions:** conversations around reading and comprehension.
- **Field notes:** documented notes from my interactions within the classroom.
- **Audio recorded conversations:** audio recordings were utilized for authentic dialogue of conversations and accurate documentation of student readings.

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2017), fluency in reading is “the ability to read continuous text with good momentum, phrasing, appropriate pausing, intonation, and stress” (p. 652). The audio recordings were further utilized to determine the students’ comprehension of the text. Fountas and Pinnell running records were the assessment utilized in the audio recordings. Fluency is a contributing factor of a reader’s ability to construct meaning from the text (Taberski, 2011).

### **Procedures**

The whole class participated in the readings of various predetermined, appropriate leveled texts. The students were asked to read aloud to the class as well as independently, and quietly to themselves. We discussed connections, annotation, key words, and reviewed previously taught strategies. The connections readers make to a text were one or potentially multiple combinations of the following: text-to-text (meaning the text relates to another text previously read), text-to-self (meaning the text relates to something of importance to the reader), or text-to-world (meaning the text relates to issues that an individual can relate to in “their” world). Students re-read and engaged in a close reading text to develop a deeper understanding of the text.

Repeated readings are effective strategies for fluency and enhancing reading comprehension skills for students. The intention of rereading is to familiarize the students with the text and allow students to increase their comprehension. Close reading is an effective strategy in which the students obtain information directly from the text to support their understandings (Kucer, 2007). Students read different texts on the same topic; which allowed them to build background, conceptual knowledge that is necessary for reading comprehension.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of this study was verified with the technique of data triangulation. I collected multiple forms of data to establish my findings. I then had my work, the information obtained from my research project, reviewed by an advisor and research partner. The research partner and advisor critically reviewed the data to ensure any preconceived biases did not affect the outcomes.

**Analysis**

I obtained data, from my participants, over the course of a four-week period. I separated the data that I received into sections. I divided the work into sections of field notes, audio recordings, student artifacts, as well as semi structured interview notes. There were only seven students within my research project, making it manageable to determine each student's work. I utilized a coding process to decipher and analyze my data. Through the coding process, I was able to determine emerging themes. "Themes are major ideas about the central phenomenon that emerge when the researcher groups several codes together during the analysis" (Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 368).

I categorized the student artifacts by whether the artifact demonstrated that the student utilized strategies to answer the prompts. I further separated the student artifacts into the settings the work was completed within. This allowed me to see which students were utilizing the strategies independently and which students required group work and direct instruction. Also, this allowed me to see which students had a stronger understanding of the text. I further coded the texts in which students utilized strategies while I was the one who read aloud the text.

The purpose of my research was to learn more about how to help students read for meaning and to provide the skills and strategies necessary to support reading for meaning. I looked to review the impact that strategies had as a means for comprehension of the text.

As I was observing my students and while I was going through and coding the artifacts I collected, I noted an emergence of themes. The first finding indicates that when the students utilized strategies, such as underlining for specific information in a text, they were more successful with writing detailed, substantial paragraphs. The second finding suggests that on the occasions during which I read aloud to the students, they paid closer attention to the text. I feel that this was due to not having to decode the text. The class was able to follow along easier and obtain a stronger understanding of the text. Finally, the third finding indicates that when a text or article was read, the students were able to recall and summarize the text more successfully when provided with prompting questions.

### **Finding One**

***When students utilize strategies, they demonstrate greater comprehension.***

A comprehension study conducted by Scholin, Haegele, & Burns (2013) noticed an immediate growth in their data when students were taught comprehension strategies effectively. The strategies were implemented at the beginning of the lesson and reinforced throughout.

The students within my fourth grade class have a limited attention span, as do most ten-year-old children. They want to get their work and complete it as quickly as possible so they can move onto the next thing. My students often read through a text as quickly as possible, then struggle with the information that is being asked. They may look for adult guidance prior to

working through the text independently. I felt that it would be beneficial for them to slow down and use strategies to decode the text.

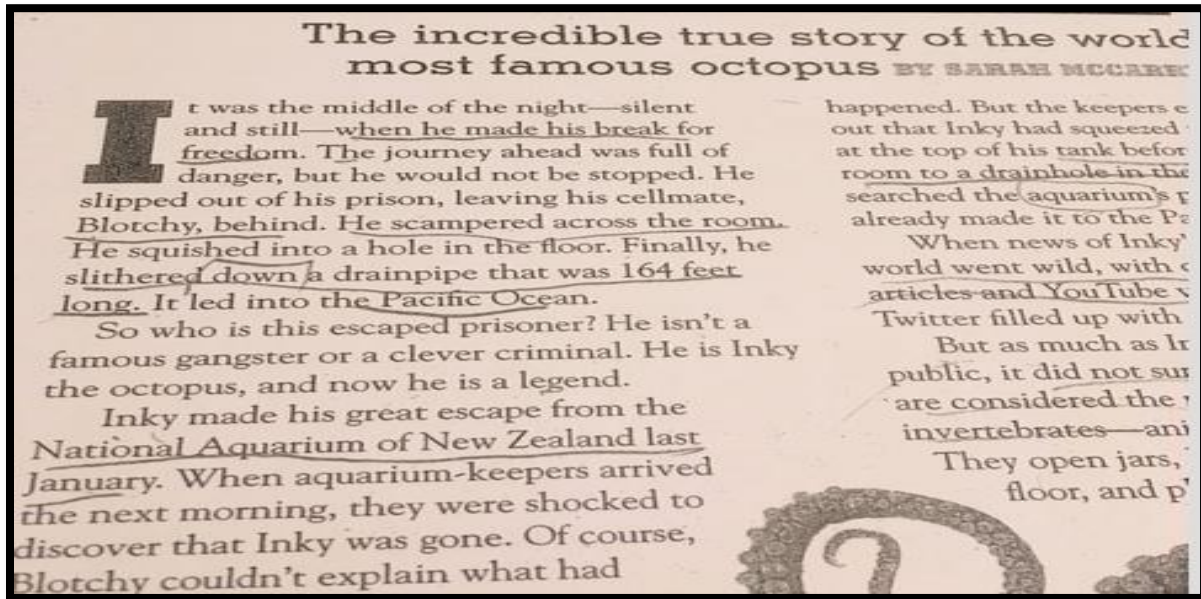
The first week I spent together with my students, we held discussions about the importance of understanding a text. We discussed various strategies that could/should be utilized while reading. I further emphasized that it is important to have a variety of strategies and not rely on one independently. We discussed annotation, think alouds, underlining key points within a text (not an actual book), close reading, as well as re-reading.

I did not demonstrate all of these to the class on the same day. We worked on the skills one at a time. The presentation was the same with each strategy. I modeled the expected behavior multiple times. Then we collectively worked on the expected behavior during a whole group setting. Then the students were released to work on the strategy independently. While the students were working independently, I walked around the room to monitor, observe and discuss the text with students as necessary.

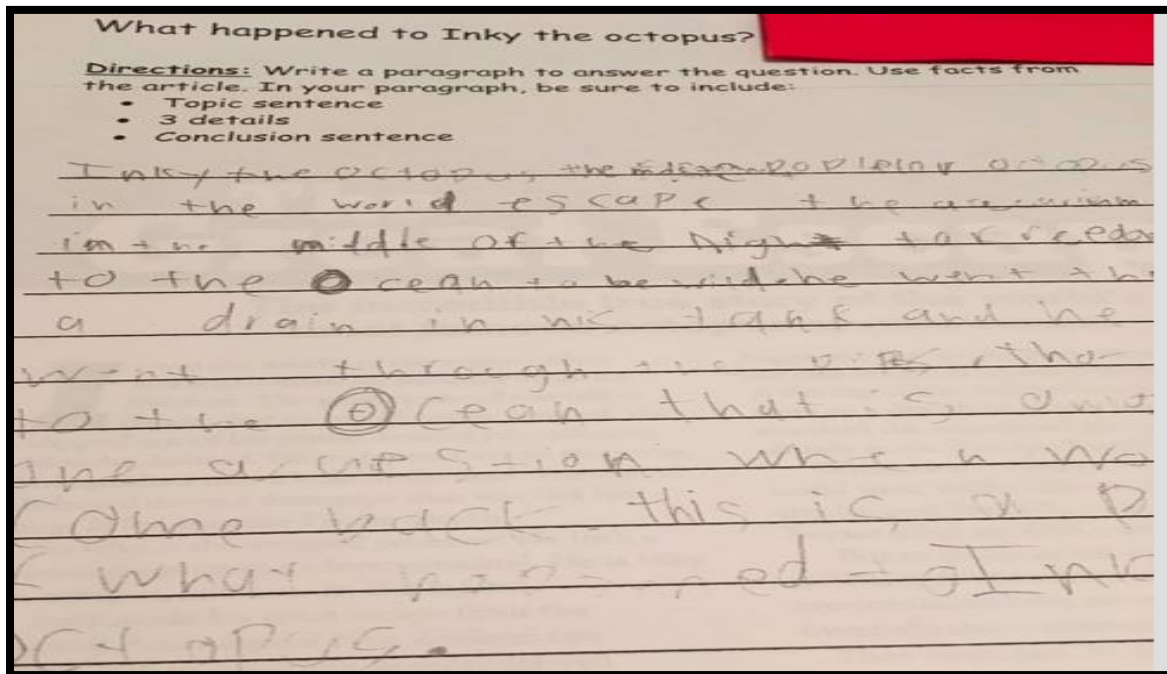
The students were asked which strategy they preferred to use and would be most likely to utilize. It is important to understand that not all strategies will work the same for each reader (Kiefer & Lesaux, 2007). That is why it is imperative to provide students with an array of strategies to be able to use the one that works the best for them and their reading comprehension.

Five out of the seven participants stated that they like the “underlining” strategy because “(they) were able to write on their papers” and “it was fun underlining things we want to.” There were two students regularly utilized the underlining strategy with their text, without being prompted. The rest of the class needed prompting to remember to use a strategy that they felt would help them with remembering key details within the text. The two students, Phinneas and Esmeralda, who regularly, without prompting, used the strategy, were consistently producing

more detailed work than their peers. The two students have found a strategy that works for them and were correctly regularly using it effectively to support their writings.



**Figure 1:** Example of student, Phinneas, using the strategy of underlining a text



**Figure 2:** Example of a writing sample after underlining the text for information.

**Finding Two**

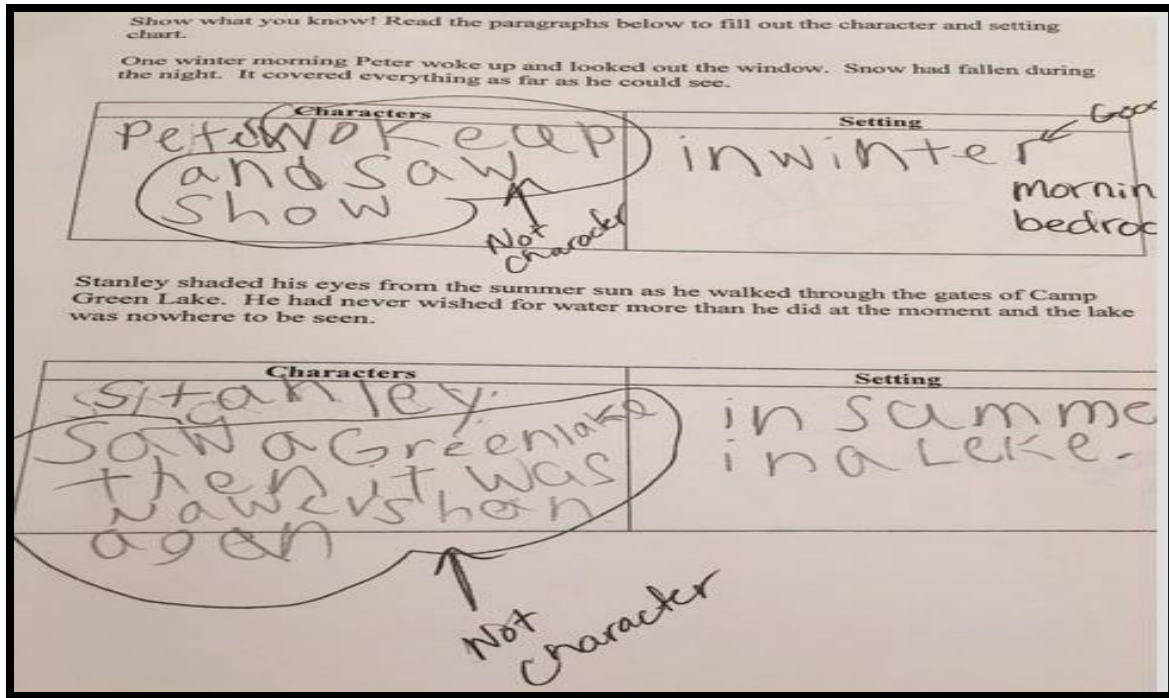
*Students demonstrate greater comprehension when a text is read aloud to them, instead of independently reading a text.*

The students are under a preconceived notion that to be a good reader, you need to read fast. This is a detriment for my students. They are struggling to read the text, let alone read it as quickly as they can. The classroom that I conducted this research project in partakes in a weekly, one minute timed reading assessment to see how many words a student can read accurately within that sixty-second-time limit. This is sending the wrong message to students.

As part of my semi-structured interview, I asked the students how they felt as a reader. Every single student stated that they were “good at reading”. I further asked, “what makes a reader a ‘good’ reader?” and the response I received from all seven of the students was “someone that reads fast”.

As the class was reading, as quickly as they could, they were stumbling over words, skipping words or pages, mispronouncing common sight words and struggling to make sense of the text. When I read the text aloud to the students, and they followed along, they were able to make sense of the text. They did not have to decode or sound out common and uncommon words.

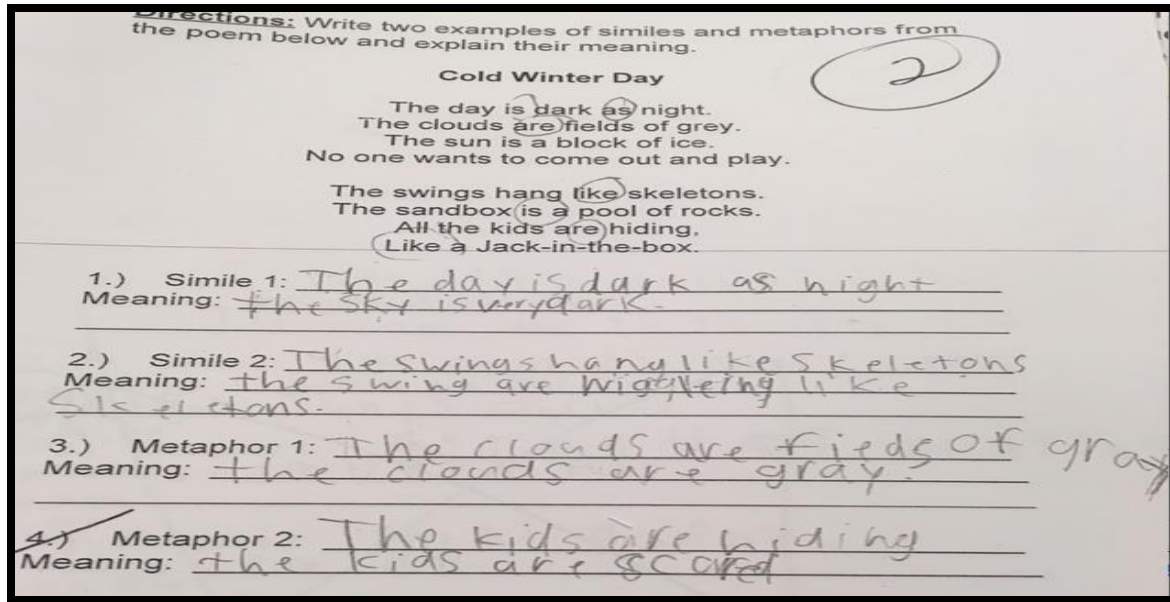
The work sample provided below is an example of a student artifact that was completed independently. The students had to read two paragraphs, one was three sentences and the other two sentences. Once they read the information, they were to complete the graphic organizer. The students had to make an inference based on the text. They had to state who the characters were as well as the setting of the passage.



**Figure 3:** Christopher (pseudonym) independently completing the assignment.

Another example was completed together in a small group. Prior to reading the poem, we discussed similes and metaphors. The text was read aloud and the students were to complete the exercise independently. As you can observe with this specific student, strategies were utilized to help with completion of the assignment. The student circled key words to assist with determining the metaphors and similes.





**Figure 4:** Phinneas continues to utilize strategies to effectively complete the assignment.

The students had greater comprehension when a text was read aloud. They did not have to struggle with unknown text and were able to focus on determining the information, instead of working on decoding skills. Some examples of students’ miscues included repeated omissions during readings and replacing words within text. See the figure below: For example,

<u>Print says</u>	<u>Read text</u>
Would be totally fun	Would be <i>total</i> fun
The truck crashes	The truck <i>carries</i> ’
Then big trucks come to carry the piles of snow away	<i>The</i> big trucks come to carry the <i>place</i> of the snow
It picks up	<i>This</i> picks up
Jim did want to bring	Jim <i>did not</i> want to bring
Then	Often read as <i>when</i>

These are some of the changes that students made while reading on their own, potentially changing the meaning of the text.

In this final example, below the text was also read aloud to the students. We further discussed the text prior to the students completing the questions related to the text. We made connections to baseball. We discussed who had played baseball and if they thought it was a fun, team sport. Only one student did not like baseball. This was a relatable text for many of the students.

author's purpose	
<p>A Great Sport</p> <p>Are you tired of sitting around the house, bored and lonely? You should join a sport like baseball! Baseball is a great team sport to play. It will give you exercise and you'll spend time with other kids. You can compete and learn more about the sport! Maybe you're the next Nolan Ryan!</p>	
<p>What is the author's purpose for this text?</p> <p>a. To inform about the game of baseball. b. To entertain with a story about baseball. c. To explain how to play a game of baseball. d. To persuade you to play baseball.</p> <p>Which sentence from the text shows the author's opinion?</p> <p>a. Are you tired of sitting around the house, bored and lonely? b. It will give you exercise and you'll spend time with other kids. c. You can compete and learn more about the sport. d. Baseball is a great team sport to play.</p>	<p>3. Read this sentence from the text. "You should join a sport like baseball!" From this sentence, the reader can tell...</p> <p>a. The author thinks baseball is a boring sport. b. The author thinks baseball is a good sport to play. c. The author thinks baseball is a dangerous sport. d. The author thinks it is important to have free time.</p> <p>4. What is the author's message?</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">Baseball is a good sport to play.</p>

**Figure 4:** Ryland (pseudonym) was more successful when the text was read aloud.

### Finding Three

*Students are more successful at demonstrating comprehension when prompts are utilized.*

Meaning of the text was verified through conversation, artifacts, and Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments. The students when asked to summarize a text without any prompt,

would simply restate the last part of the text that was read. If asked to delve deeper, they were not able to successfully. The students had to look back to the text to obtain further information, or simply did not state anything further.

For the following example of a text, the students read it independently and then had to complete the questions. The students had to make inferences, this is another difficult concept for students. Students need to utilize the text and make connections with prior knowledge to determine what is happening without it being explicitly stated. The student that completed this artifact, utilized underlining strategy for words that helped to determine what Katie was dressed up as.

Katie was excited about tonight. Happily, she put on her big, red shoes and bright, yellow outfit. Her mom helped Katie paint her face white with big, red circle on each cheek. Just before Katie ran out the door to meet her friends, she attached her large, squeaky nose and placed a bright blue, pointy hat on top of her head. She grabbed an empty bag and went out into the night.

1. What was Katie excited about?  
It was Halloween.
2. What do you think Katie was dressed as?  
She was Dancesa a clown.
3. What words helped you know?  
Because she put on <sup>makeup</sup> and a <sup>square</sup> nos and <sup>pointy</sup> big red shoes and a <sup>pointy</sup> hat.

**Figure 5:** Savannah (pseudonym) utilized strategies to independently respond to the text.

The Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments have a comprehension section for assessment, once the student has finished reading the text aloud. There are prompts provided for students, if they are not able to sufficiently discuss what happened within the story

independently. Every student within my research project needed to have the prompts read in order to discuss the story. They also had to go back and look into the text.

The Fountas and Pinnell assessments are a cold read for the student. This indicates that they have not ever read the text before, however it is within their independent reading level. We hope they are going to be able to make connections to the text on one read. Connections are to be about the text, within the text, and beyond the text. The ‘beyond the text’ connection was the most difficult for the students within my research project. Each student needed to be prompted (with preset questions for each assessment) in order to answer ‘beyond the text’ connections. Even with the prompts, students regularly stated “I don’t know” or “it didn’t say” as a response. The comprehension conversations after a Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment, each student needed additional prompting for the basic retelling of the story. They did not respond with only the “talk about what you learned in this book” prompt.

Key Understandings	Prompts
<p><b>Within the Text</b></p> <p>Edwin got a terrible haircut and had to wear a wig hat (or wig) all of the time.</p> <p>Recounts most of the important events such as: Edwin needed a haircut <u>so his mom and dad gave him one</u>; his hair looked awful; he had to wear a wig hat everywhere; his hair grew out again but he wouldn't let his mom cut it; he said that next time he would pick the barber to give him his haircut.</p> <p>Note any additional understandings:</p>	<p>TP What was the problem in this story? <u>He needed a haircut</u></p> <p>TP How did Edwin and his parents solve the problem? What happened at the end? <u>He had hair</u></p>
<p><b>Beyond and About the Text</b></p> <p>Edwin hated his haircut. It was so bad that he was embarrassed to go to school. <u>nervous he would be</u></p> <p>Edwin didn't care if other kids teased him about his wig hat. He just went on and did everything he always did. <u>laughed at</u></p> <p>Edwin stuck up for himself in the end when he said he would pick the barber next time.</p> <p>The beginning and ending of the story were alike because he needed a haircut, <u>but</u> in the end Edwin changed his mind about who should cut his hair.</p> <p>Some ways the author made this story funny were (any specific pages where the words or illustrations show humor).</p> <p>Note any additional understandings:</p>	<p>TP How do you think Edwin felt when he first looked at himself with his new haircut? <u>I don't know</u></p> <p>TP What kind of kid was Edwin? What was he like? What makes you think that? <u>nice - mom + dad</u></p> <p>TP Edwin acted differently at the end of the story than he did at the beginning. What did he do that was different? <u>I don't know</u></p> <p>TP How were the beginning and ending parts of this story alike? How were they different? <u>Wig hat</u></p> <p>TP This author and illustrator wanted to make Edwin's Haircut a very funny book. Can you show me some parts that are funny? <u>Wig hat</u></p>

Figure 6: Esmeralda’s retelling of a Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment.

## Discussion

The purpose of this research project was to determine how to support students in reading for meaning. The focus of this research project was based on the following research questions:

- *Why do some students struggle with reading comprehension?*
- *What strategies can I provide students that struggle with reading for meaning?*
- *In what ways can I support students in developing deeper level thinking while reading?*

I found that some of students that I was able to work with were able to benefit from the strategies we worked on. Not all of the students utilized the strategies effectively and some did not use them at all.

The data analysis confirmed that students need strategies to make meaning from a text. Strategies and prompts scaffold student thinking. This is imperative for making meaning of a text. Furthermore, data showed that students do not have to decode and/or decipher a text when it was read aloud. This allowed for students to focus on the meaning of the text in relation to attempting to figure out specific words.

## Conclusion

### Conclusion One

#### *Strategies and prompts scaffold student thinking.*

Learning strategies are important to promote students' reading comprehension (Yang, 2016). The data that I collected verified that strategies aided in student thinking. The prompts were supportive for students to develop further meaning of the text. I found this to be an

important factor within the students reading comprehension. The data collected verified that when students utilize a strategy that they have been taught, and practice sufficiently, they were able to respond to texts more effectively. The collaboration between teacher and students is essential with building a deeper level of understanding. The gradual release of responsibility as stated by Fischer (2008), “requires that the teacher shift from assuming all the responsibility to performing a task...to a situation in which the students assume all of the responsibility” (p.1). This is modeled for the students to first observe the teacher utilizing a strategy. Then the teachers and students work together building a foundation of the strategy. Finally, students are released to work on the strategy independently.

This scaffolding allows the student to build an understanding of the strategy. The process begins learning through modeling and further while actively participating. Students are able to engage in more effective conversations when they understand what the text is about. Writing responses were detailed, specific, longer, and more accurate than when strategies were not utilized. The students began with underlining extensive parts of the text, to progressively underlining key words. This is part of the learning process. Interacting with the strategy allowed deeper thinking for all students.

## **Conclusion Two**

***Students do not have to decode and/or decipher the text when it is read aloud to them.***

Through my research I found that the students were able to understand a text more often when it was read aloud to the class. Taberski (2011) stated, “read-alouds and shared reading allow us (teachers) to model how fluent reading sounds and how it enhances our enjoyment and shapes our understanding of a text” (p. 127). When the students did not have to analyze or

decode the text, they are able to listen and build off of the interpretation of the text. They are promoting their language skills through listening. When students consistently listen to text read fluently, it will aid in their ability to comprehend the text as well as his/her ability to read fluently; “we want students to read words accurately with appropriate speed, intonation, and emphasis so that they understand what they’re reading” (Taberski, 2011, p. 8). Students are able to further their thinking and understanding of the text through collaboration. The students are able to gain meaning while listening to the teacher read the text as opposed to reading a text independently, deciphering, or omitting the text, which will allow increased reading comprehension.

During the time I spent together with the students, I observed their lack of attention to the text. According to Bellinger & DiPerna (2011) “...children that do not understand what they read will be less motivated to continue reading” (p. 416). Students were often incorrectly reading texts while reading. It appeared as if the students were frustrated and it seemed obvious that they were not engaged in the reading. While the students were reading texts, words were being combined, sentences were missed, at times whole paragraphs were missed, and the students did not notice. It surprised me that this was not an issue for the students, which further verified that they were struggling to understand the text.

During the semi-structured interview, the students stated that a good reader is one that reads fast. Students have this misconception about reading. I believe that it has, in part, to do with the weekly, timed, one-minute assessment to see how many words the student can read accurately. This is not an effective way to assess students. They are not able to finish the text, they do not comprehend the text, they are told to read as much of a passage as they can within a minute.

**Implication One*****Teachers need to directly teach reading for meaning.***

Teachers cannot assume that all students read for meaning. Texts need to be broken down extensively, so that students understand the reading process and that texts are used for learning, not only enjoyment. Yang (2016) stated, “Reading is probably one of the most important means by which we require knowledge or information from the world around us” (p. 586). The process of reading is active. Students need to be engaged, making connections and determining meaning within and beyond the text instantly. There is a literacy shift within the fourth grade school year. Students are no longer learning to read but are reading to learn (Scholin, Haegele, & Burns, 2013). This is why it is so important for teachers to teach reading for meaning. As Taberski (2011) stated,

...there is no one silver-bullet approach to teaching children to read with meaning. We know what works for one child may be ineffective with another. We know that there are many teaching practices and experiences that must be actualized so that children can get the most out of what they read. These experiences need to begin in the earliest grades and build as children mature (p. 27).

This is why it is so important for our teachers to modify instruction and teach to the needs of the students. Teaching reading for meaning needs to be addressed as students are learning to read. There needs to be purpose with reading and students need to understand that purpose at an early age, thereby enhancing the reading skills he/she previously learned and continuously building upon these skills.



**Implication Two**

*Teachers should use the gradual release of responsibility model to support students in making meaning.*

The gradual release of responsibility model is designed to ensure student understanding and allow students to take ownership of their learning. It is a multi-step, scaffolding process in which instruction begins with the teacher and gradually transfers solely to the student (Pardo, 2004). The Fisher & Frey (2013) model of the gradual release of responsibility begins with direct instruction of a focus lesson, followed by guided instruction, then student group work, which leads finally to independent learning. This is a gradual process for students.

The teacher is responsible for introducing the information through modeled instruction, which allows students to observe how and what the teacher is thinking. The expected behaviors and outcomes are explicitly demonstrated. The teacher then will work together with the students during guided instruction. This instruction is where children are collaborating together with the teacher and engage in the lesson. During guided instruction, the teacher will ask prompted, strategic questions. Thereby making frequent checks for understanding to ensure the students are successful. Once the students have an understanding of the expected behaviors, they are to work together collaboratively within groups. This will allow the students an opportunity to enhance their understanding together before working independently. Once the students have effectively practiced and have an understanding of what is expected, they are able to apply these strategies to everyday situations.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this research project include participant size, lack of time for data collection and use of only one grade level. Time constraints limited the research to four weeks. This was a condensed timeframe to implement strategies effectively and collect data. The time frame allowed four weeks of data collection and a shorter time for analyzing the data. Furthermore, a generalization of the results would potentially be more effective with a larger group of students, as well as with a cross comparison at different grade levels. I was unable to obtain feedback or varying perspectives during the collection of the data, as I was the only researcher conducting the study.

**Research Suggestions**

Based upon my research, I would like to conduct a cross comparison with general education fourth grade students. In doing so, I would be able to collect data across student populations and see if similar strategies are effective (and necessary) within general education settings. I feel that based on the limited number of participants and classroom population the outcome may be different in a larger sized classroom. Furthermore, I would like to see what impact (if any) families have on students' reading for meaning.

**Overall Significance**

This research project is important as it looks at how to support students in reading for meaning. It acknowledges that scaffolding strategies, conducting think alouds, and teacher read texts support students' reading comprehension. The results of this research project show that when strategies are utilized effectively, student work and comprehension improve. It further verifies that students have an increased understanding of a text when they do not have to decode

the text for meaning. This study can be utilized by multiple grade levels that are in need of supporting students in reading for meaning.

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