Barriers to Reading Comprehension: Why do they occur and what can we do about them?

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1. What are the possible roots of poor reading comprehension?
2. How can we use assessment tools to guide instruction?
3. What are some of the most effective strategies to help students improve comprehension skills?

Reading Comprehension skills evaluated on group-administered, standardized tests are best used as indicators of progress in teaching all students to read. Group-administered tests provide little information to guide instruction or identify why students obtained low scores.

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF LOW COMPREHENSION SCORES
- Inaccurate or slow identification of words
- Limited vocabulary
- Lack of prior knowledge of content
- Failure to attend to text structures for clues
- Failure to monitor understanding (applying effective comprehension strategies/thinking skills)
- Weak stamina; weak memory (look-backs?)
- Inappropriate test-taking strategies (anxiety, carelessness, failure to understand the task)

Consider adding an informal reading inventory to your assessments

Analysis of Informal Reading Inventories:

What is the Qualitative Reading Inventory (5th edition)?
- Individually-administered informal reading inventory
- Latest 2011 edition w/DVD
- Tables and charts to assist scoring and planning interventions
- Examples of students reading passages w/scored protocols
- Sample reports
- New passages for very beginning readers
- Additional narrative passages through Grade 3
- New measure of decoding ability (reading by analogy)
Everyone Reading: Barriers to Reading
Comprehension

When to use the QRI–5 (2010)
Leslie, L & Caldwell, J.S. Pearson Publications.

- Use for a more comprehensive examination of comprehension of text
- Provide diagnostic information about:
  1. Conditions under which students can identify words and comprehend text successfully
  2. Conditions that appear to result in unsuccessful word identification, decoding and/or comprehension

How is the QRI–5 different from other Informal Reading Inventories?
- Provides both narrative and expository text at each level
- Passages are divided into those w/ & w/o pictures (pre-primer through second grade levels) to determine reliance on external clues for word I.D. and comprehension.
- Includes assessment of prior knowledge of passage content (familiar/unfamiliar?)

Content of the QRI–5

- Graded word lists
- Narrative and expository passages at pre-primer through high school levels (generally familiar topics)
  - Pre-primer-Grade 2 options with and w/o pictures
- Grade 6–High School (representative of the curriculum)
  - Literature, science, social studies
  - Extended passages, think-alouds

DIAGNOSTIC COMPREHENSION OPTIONS OF THE QRI–V

- Comprehension Ability
  - Narrative/Expository text
  - Prior knowledge assessment
  - Familiar/Unfamiliar text
  - Oral/Silent/Listening formats
  - Unaided free recall
  - Explicit/Implicit questions

We know there’s a problem... now what?

- RECOMMENDATIONS FOR READING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION FROM NATIONAL READING PANEL(2000)
  www.nationalreadingpanel.org
- Text comprehension is enhanced when:
  - Readers actively relate the ideas presented in print to their own knowledge and experiences
  - Construct mental representations in memory
  - Explicit/formal instruction in comprehension strategies enhances understanding

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR READING COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION FROM NATIONAL READING PANEL(2000)

- Use of a variety of techniques is recommended
- Teach strategies for:
  - Recall of information
  - Summarizing
  - Question generation
### TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YESTERDAY</th>
<th>TODAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Fluent reading = good comprehension</td>
<td>- Reading as an active process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Independent practice in subskills = improved reading comprehension</td>
<td>- Activating prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identifying important ideas</td>
<td>- Organizing information to facilitate retrieval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Creating webs of connections within text</td>
<td>- Metacognition (monitoring understanding)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### BEHAVIORS OF GOOD AND POOR READERS

#### Teaching Adolescents with Learning Disabilities: Strategies and Methods by Donald Deshler, Edwin S. Ellis and B. Keith Lenz

#### Before Reading...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD READERS</th>
<th>POOR READERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Activate prior knowledge</td>
<td>- Start reading without preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understand task and set purpose</td>
<td>- Begin reading w/o knowing why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Combine intrinsic and extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>- Use primarily extrinsic motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use positive, affirming self-statements</td>
<td>- Use negative, deprecating self-statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Choose appropriate strategies</td>
<td>- Read w/o considering how to approach the task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### During Reading...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD READERS</th>
<th>POOR READERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Focus attention</td>
<td>- Are easily distracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Monitor their by understanding</td>
<td>- Do not know what to do when they lack understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowing what is being understood</td>
<td>- Do not recognize important vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### After Reading...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD READERS</th>
<th>POOR READERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Reflect on what was read</td>
<td>- Stop reading and thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Summarize major ideas</td>
<td>- Believe success is a result of luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Seek additional information from outside sources</td>
<td>- Do not set any organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Believe success is a result of effort</td>
<td>- Add on rather than integrate information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### POSSIBLE PROBLEM 1: Speed and accuracy of decoding

- Children who don’t develop the ability to read words accurately and quickly will encounter difficulty in comprehension (Perfetti, 1985; 1988)
- Attention over-directed to identifying individual words -> inability to access word meanings efficiently and integrate sentence meanings across a passage
Vocabulary is linked to reading comprehension

- Vocabulary size in kindergarten is an effective predictor of reading comprehension in the middle elementary years (Scarborough, 1998)
- Orally-tested vocabulary at end of Grade 1 predicts more than 30% of grade 11 reading comprehension (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997)

NRP findings on Vocabulary Instruction (2000):
- Vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly
- Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important
- Learning in rich contexts improves vocabulary
- Incidental learning
- Computer technology

POSSIBLE PROBLEM 2: Limited Vocabulary (3)

Resources:

POSSIBLE PROBLEM 3: Lack of prior knowledge

Major problem:
- Poorest readers read least — ‘Matthew Effect’
- Can’t wait for decoding skills to develop as knowledge gap increases
- Preteach essential knowledge/vocabulary
- Books on Tape:
  - www.LearningAlly.org
  - www.Bookshare.org
- Kindle/ipad/Nook read-aloud functions
  - http://www.ehow.com/
POSSIBLE PROBLEM 4: Failure to attend to Text Structures

- **NARRATIVE WRITING**
  - Story grammar is the most useful text structure to teach for narrative; Improves comprehension

- **EXPOSITORY WRITING**
  - Contains a variety of text structures
  - More difficult to identify
  - Narrative strategies not helpful

TEXT STRUCTURE: Expository Writing

- Common Text Structures
  - Sequence or chronological presentation
  - Problem/solution
  - Causal relations
  - Compare and contrast
  - Illustrations and examples
  - Narrative writing
  - Descriptive writing

WORDS COMMONLY FOUND IN DIFFERENT TEXT STRUCTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause and effect and problem and solution</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because</td>
<td>for example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result</td>
<td>characteristics are includes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore</td>
<td>such as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since</td>
<td>also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons why</td>
<td>for instance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If...then</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevertheless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thus</td>
<td></td>
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POSSIBLE PROBLEM 5: Lack of strategy use during reading process

- Comprehension monitoring
- Cooperative learning
- Question answering
- Question generating
- Summarization

Monitoring Comprehension

- Think-Aloud strategy helps students to monitor comprehension of texts they read
  - predicting what happens next ("I bet that. . .")
  - picturing the text ("I can see that. . .")
  - making comparisons ("This reminds me of. . .")
  - identifying problems ("What does this mean?")
  - fixing problems ("Maybe this means. . .")
  - making comments ("I like this part because. . .")
Everyone Reading: Barriers to Reading

Comprehension

PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING STRATEGIES (PALS)

- What did you learn first?
- What did you learn next?
- What do you predict will happen?
- Read half a page.
- Did the prediction come true?
- Name the who or what
- Tell the most important thing about the who or what
- Say the main idea in 10 words or less

TYPES/LEVELS OF QUESTIONS

- 70% of teacher questions are literal in nature
- Questions usually require only recognition (locating information) or recall (answering from memory)
- Questions frequently about trivial factual make up of stories (bypass literal understanding of more important info)

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PEARSON AND JOHNSON QUESTIONING MODEL
(Pearson, P.D. & Johnson, D.D., 1978)

- TEXT EXPLICIT: Answers clearly lifted verbatim from the text
- TEXT IMPLICIT: Answers suggested in text (information needs to be integrated to answer)
- SCRIPT IMPLICIT: Answers drawn from reader’s background knowledge rather than from text

RESEARCH ABOUT QUESTIONING

- Students asked text explicit questions...
  - Recall parts of text verbatim
- Students asked text implicit questions...
  - Draw more inferences from text
  - Integrate ideas within text
- Students asked script implicit questions...
  - Make more interpretive/evaluative connections between text and their prior knowledge


- FOUR KINDS OF QUESTIONS
  - Right There
  - Think and Search (also called “Putting It Together”)
  - On My Own
  - Author and You
**QAR STRATEGY: PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION**

- Give immediate feedback
- Progress from shorter to longer texts
- Build independence by guiding students from group to independent activities
- Provide transition from the easier task to the more difficult

**QAR RESEARCH RESULTS**

- Increase in both quality and quantity of correct answers to comprehension questions
- Particularly effective with children with average to low reading levels
- Higher comprehension scores
- Students transferred strategy to content area classrooms

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**ReQuest (Manzo, A, 1969)**

- Both students and teacher silently read a common segment of text (1–2 sentences to 1–2 paragraphs)
- Teacher closes the book and is questioned about the passage by the students
- Switch roles. Teacher now questions students about material

**ReQuest (2)**

- When questions are exhausted, the next segment of text is read
- When enough text has been processed to make predictions about the remainder of the assignment, exchange of questions stops. Teacher asks: What do you think the rest of the story will be about? Why do you think so?

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- Strategies for reading comprehension
- Teaches self-monitoring for comprehension
- Instructional format in the form of a structured dialogue between teachers and students (students assume role of the teacher)
- Dialogue structured by use of four strategies: predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing

**Research Support**

- Originally designed for students who were adequate decoders but poor comprehenders
- Studies and results replicated and carried over to general education classrooms with larger group sizes
- Designed for expository text but easily transferable
- According to research, RT is easy to generalize and transfer to new and unique situations
- Once strategies are internalized, they become automatic and second nature to readers
COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIC READING (Janette K. Klingner and Sharon Vaughn, Teaching Exceptional Children July/August 1998)

> BEFORE READING
> 1. PREVIEW
>   - A. BRAINSTORM: What do we already know about the topic?
>   - B. PREDICT: What do we think we will learn about the topic when we read the passage?
> 2. READ (the first page or section)

DURING READING

> 1. CLICK and CLUNK
>   - Were there any parts that were hard to understand (clunks)?
>   - How can we fix the clunks? (Use fix-up strategies)
>     - Reread the sentence and look for key ideas to help you understand the word.
>     - Reread the sentence with the clunk and the sentences before or after the clunk looking for clues.
>     - Look for a prefix or suffix in the word.
>     - Break the word apart and look for smaller words.

> 2. GET THE GIST
>   - A. What is the most important person, place or thing?
>   - B. What is the most important idea about the person, place or thing?
> 3. READ (Do steps 2 and 3 again, with all the paragraphs or sections in the passage)

> 3. WRAP UP
>   - A. Ask questions: What questions would show we understand the most important information? What are the answers to those questions?
>   - B. Review: What did we learn?

RAP: PARAPHRASING STRATEGY (Deshler, Ellis, Lenz, 1996)

Step 1: Read a paragraph
As you are reading the paragraph, look for the topic sentences or clue words that signal the main ideas and details.

Step 2: Ask yourself, “What were the main idea and details in this paragraph?”
What was this paragraph about? What should I remember about it?

Step 3: Put the main idea and details into your own words.
Say, “This paragraph is about _________.”

REQUIREMENTS FOR A PARAPHRASE

- Must contain a complete thought
  - Subject
  - Verb
- Must contain useful information
- Must make sense
- Must be in your own words
- Only one general statement per paragraph is allowed
WHAT IS THIS PARAGRAPH ABOUT?

This paragraph is about _________________.

WHAT DOES IT TELL ME ABOUT _________________?

It tells me  _____________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

FINDING THE MAIN IDEA: QUESTIONS TO ASK

- What is this paragraph about?
  - This paragraph is about _________________.
- What does it tell me about ________________?
  - It tells me _________________.

FINDING THE MAIN IDEA: PLACES TO LOOK

- Look in the first sentence of the paragraph
- Look for repetitions of the same word or words in the whole paragraph

RIDER: A VISUALIZATION STRATEGY (U. of Kansas Center for Research on Learning)

- R – Read the first sentence
- I – Make a picture in your mind
- D – Describe the picture you see
- E – Evaluate if your picture makes sense with the story thus far
- R – If you picture makes sense, read on. If your picture does not make sense, reread it all again

BENEFITS OF VISUAL LEARNING TECHNIQUES

- Help students to . . .
  - Clarify thinking (process, organize, and prioritize new information)
  - Reinforce understanding (reveal patterns, interrelationships and interdependencies)
  - Integrate new knowledge
  - Identify misconceptions

Uses of graphic and semantic organizers

- activating background knowledge and setting a purpose for reading
- generating lists of character traits with supporting evidence
- helping students to see text structure, aiding in understanding, remembering, retelling and writing summaries
- deepening understanding of unfamiliar vocabulary

DETERMINING CHARACTER TRAITS

- PHYSICAL TRAITS
  - The way people look
- CHARACTER TRAITS
  - Ways to tell what a person is like
  - Help us to understand a character’s personality
  - Clues to what someone likes, feels, or how he or she behaves
WAYS WE FIND OUT ABOUT A CHARACTER’S TRAITS

- Direct statements
- Dialogue
- Action
- Observations of appearance

FLATS Strategy for Determining Character Traits (2003, Diana Ambrose)

- F How does your character FEEL?
- L What does your character LOOK like?
- A How does the character ACT toward….?
  How do others ACT toward your character?
- T What is your character THINKING?
- S What does your character SAY about….?
  What do other characters SAY about him?

Resources for words describing character traits

- http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/p-as_docs/sample_character_traits.pdf
- http://www.lti.appstate.edu/reading_resources/Character_Trait Descriptive_Adjectives.htm

RESOURCES

- GENERAL
  - Report of the National Reading Panel 800–370–2943
    www.nationalreadingpanel.org
- GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS
  - Continental Press 1–800–233–0759
  - Creative Teaching Press 1–800–287–8879
- Narrative Text Post-Its
  - ELEMENTS OF PLOT POST-ITS
    - Project Read/Language Circle 1–800–450–0343
    www.storystickies.com

RESOURCES (2)

- Software/apps
  - www.Kidspiration.com
  - www.inspiration.com
- Websites
  - http://www.meadowscenter.org/vgc/
  - http://www.miamisci.org/tec/ (Reciprocal Teaching materials)
  - http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat
  - http://www.resourceroom.net/index.asp
  - http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox/
  - www.peerassistedlearningstrategies.org