

## A model for teaching reading comprehension

Research has shown that teachers who model and explain effective comprehension strategies help students to become engaged readers (Almasi, 2003; Pressley, 2002).

To help young children learn to comprehend narrative and expository text, teachers need to:

- Provide background information so that children have some prior knowledge of the text before it is read to them
- Ask children to anticipate and predict what might happen in a story
- Read materials to children from the beginning to end
- Refer back to the text to think aloud with the children
- Refer back to the text to clarify any difficult parts
- Slow down when reading or listening to information that children need to remember and might be difficult for them
- Discuss the text with children after reading so they can reflect on ideas and summarize about what was read

The strategies that the teacher decides to use provide activities to engage the readers actively with the text. They are based on the interest and level of the readers, as well as the type of text.

**A model of comprehension instruction** that is being discussed below does not simply include instruction in specific comprehension strategies and opportunities to read, write, and discuss texts. It tries to connect and integrate different learning opportunities.

This model includes five components which are introduced gradually over a period of time.

**The five components are:**

**1. An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.**

Before the children begin to read a text the teacher tells them what to do.

For example, if the teacher wants to introduce “predicting” as a comprehension strategy she will begin by telling the students:

“Predicting is making guesses about what will come next in the text you are reading. You should make predictions a lot when you read. For now, you should stop every two pages that you read and make some predictions; you can then read on to find out if your prediction was correct.”

**2. Teacher modelling of the strategy in action.**

During a read aloud session the teacher shows the children what to do, in other words the teacher demonstrates or models the strategy.

For example, if she is going to model “predicting” as a strategy, she will begin by telling the students:

“I am going to make predictions while I read this book. I will start with just the cover here. Hmm...I see a picture of an owl. It looks like he—I think it is a he—is wearing pyjamas, and he is carrying a candle. I *predict* that this is going to be a make-believe story because in real life owls do not really wear pyjamas and carry candles. I predict the story is going to be about this owl, and it is going to take place at night time.” She may then look at the title and say:

“The title will give me more clues about the book; the title is *Owl at Home*. So this makes me think even more that this book is going to be about the owl. He will probably be the main character. And the story will take place in his house.

“Okay, I have made some predictions about the book based on the cover. Now I am going to open up the book and begin reading and see how far my predictions are correct.”

### **3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action.**

During the read aloud session the teacher will ask the students to join her in making predictions. For example, she will tell the students:

“I have made some good predictions so far in the book. From this part on I want you to make predictions with me. Each of us should stop after reading two pages and think about what might happen next.... Okay, now let’s hear what you think and why....”

### **4. Guided practice or using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility.**

Once the children have become familiar with making predictions, the teacher gets them to do it on their own in a guided way, which is broken into two parts.

Early on . . .

The teacher asks the students to read in small groups of two or three. She will say:

“I have called the three of you together to work on making predictions while you read this and other books. After every few pages I will ask each of you to stop and make a prediction. We will talk about your predictions and then read on to see if they come true.”

Later on. . .

After the children have read a few pages the teacher will give them a chart with some pages listed on it. She will say:

“Each of you has a chart that lists different pages in your book.

When you finish reading a page on the list, stop and make a prediction.

Write the prediction in the column that says ‘Prediction.’ When you get to the next page on the list, check off whether your prediction ‘Happened,’ ‘Will not happen,’ or ‘Still might happen.’

Then make another prediction and write it down.”

**5. Independent use of the strategy.** “It is time for silent reading. As you read today, remember what we have been working on—making predictions while we read. Be sure to make predictions every two or three pages. Ask yourself why you made the prediction you did—what made you think that. Check as you read to see whether your prediction came true.”

**Note:** From the above examples we see that the teacher moved from a situation in which she assumes all the responsibility for performing a task while the students assume none, which we would call modelling or demonstrating a strategy. She then gradually over time moved to a phase in which the students assume all the responsibility while the teacher assumes none, which we would call independent strategy use. Throughout these five phases, it is important that neither the teacher nor the students lose sight of the need to coordinate different comprehension strategies. It is important to understand that Comprehension Strategies are not to be used singly—good readers do not read a book and *only* make predictions. Rather, good readers use multiple strategies constantly. They predict; they think aloud; they question; they connect with their background knowledge; they visualise and so on. Two or three of these strategies may be used during a single reading episode. Although the above descriptions foreground a particular strategy, namely prediction, this was only to highlight the actual classroom process over a period of time. Other strategies need to also be referenced, modelled, and encouraged throughout the reading process, so that children learn to engage actively, thoughtfully and meaningfully with a reading text.

**Adapted from:** *Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension* pp 209 -210 Duke and Pearson (2002); and Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) <http://www.readingonline.odrg/articles/handbook/pressley/>