The Nature of Reading Comprehension Strategies
Reading comprehension strategies are “conscious and flexible plans that readers apply and adapt to a variety of texts and tasks” (Pearson, Rohler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992, p. 169). They are processes readers engage in for the purpose of better understanding and remembering what they read. One strategy, for example, is determining what is important, that is, deciding which of the numerous concepts in any reading selection deserve special attention. Particularly when reading informational material to gain knowledge on a topic, readers must determine just what it is they need to learn. One way to do so is to read the introduction and summary, and another way is to skim through the material seeing what was highlighted in the headings and subheadings. Readers who are adept at determining what is important in a reading selection have these and a variety of other strategies available, and they employ whichever strategies best fit each reading situation they encounter. For all students— including able students, English-language learners, and students who struggle in reading— strategies lead to independence in reading.

What Strategies Are Worth Teaching
While different authorities suggest slightly different lists of strategies to teach, there is substantial agreement on the matter. The following seven strategies have been identified as useful and important to teach based on research, reviews of research, and their inclusion in instructional materials (Duffy et al., 1987; Ellery, 2005, Making Meaning, 2003; National Reading Panel, 2000; Oczkus, 2004; Ellery, 2005, Pearson et al., 1992; Pressley, 2000; RAND, 2002; Reading Explorations, 2002): Using prior knowledge, Making inferences, Questioning, Predicting, Using text structure, Summarizing, and Monitoring comprehension.

Research-Based Procedures for Teaching Strategies
Over the past 15 years, a substantial body of theory and research has supported two approaches to teaching comprehension strategies— “direct explanation of strategies” and "transactional strategies instruction." Direct explanation of strategies has been repeatedly validated and endorsed over the past two decades (e.g., Duffy, 2002; Duffy et al., 1987; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Graves et al., 2004; National Reading Panel, 2000; Pearson et al., 1992, RAND, 2002, Sweet & Snow, 2003). Direct explanation of strategies is a very explicit, step-by-step approach. A typical unit used to initially teach a strategy—for example, a unit on summarizing—might last three weeks. Gradually, over those three weeks, the instruction progresses from a situation in which the teacher does most of the work to one in which students assume primary responsibility for use of the strategy.

Transactional strategies instruction is in some ways an offshoot of direct explanation. It too has been described and researched in a number of studies (e.g., Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; Pressley, 2000, 2002; Pressley et al. 1992; Reutzel, Fawson, & Smith, 2003). Like direct explanation of strategies, transactional strategies instruction includes direct explanation as part of the initial instruction on strategies. However, as compared to direct explanation, transactional strategies instruction is much less structured and heavily embedded in the ongoing reading activities in the classroom. There is solid evidence that transactional instruction is effective, and such instruction has been shown to be particularly useful in giving students approaches that they use in their actual reading in and out of school (e.g., Anderson, 1992, Pressley, et al., 1996, Reutzel et al., 2003). However, there is also clear evidence that relatively few teachers can and do learn to use transactional strategies instruction (Pressley & El-
Dinary, 1997; Pressley, 2002). Because it is an "on the fly" approach and not supported by a specific curriculum and instructional materials, teachers have found it very difficult to work transactional strategies instruction into the school day.

While both of these programs have been shown to be effective, neither of them necessarily include activities that promote the motivation, engagement, confidence, and commitment needed for students (particularly students who have struggled with reading) to become independent and self-regulating life-long users of strategies. The comprehension strategy instruction employed in Digging Reading combines the best features of direct explanation of strategies and transactional strategies instruction with the latest research-based techniques for promoting motivation and engagement (e.g., Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004; National Research Council, 2003).

References and Further Reading


