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# **Modeling Strategic Reading Within A Text Structure Framework**

**Christine Gordon**

Duffy, Roehler, and Herrmann (1988) have described how teachers can model thinking to reveal for poor readers the reasoning process in the activation and use of prior knowledge and in the use of context clues when describing the meaning of unknown vocabulary. Through think-alouds, Gordon (1985) modeled for teachers the reasoning involved when making inferences. In a more recent article (Gordon, 1990), the method of using a think-aloud to explain a strategic reader's use of text structure was elaborated. The aim of this article is to expand on how, once students are adept at using text structure knowledge in think-alouds and in their silent reading, knowledge of text structure can serve as a framework on which not only the content of the selection is bound but within which a number of other reading strategies operate. In other words, the aim is to elucidate how a strategic reader uses text structure knowledge as an overarching strategy, a framework within which to incorporate other strategies (e.g., inferencing, using prior knowledge, making predictions, repairing confusions) to gain ideas from text.

Prior to much of the research on expository text structure, Davey (1983) operationalized the think-aloud to in-

clude five techniques which research has shown are keys to weak points in the strategies used by poor comprehenders. The weak points called for the making of predictions, describing images formed as a result of the reading, sharing analogies to link prior knowledge with new material in the text, verbalizing confusing points during on-going monitoring, and demonstrating repair strategies such as re-reading, reading ahead, and using context clues. Davey (1983) recommended that the teacher select or develop a short passage to read aloud that has points where students encounter difficulty. As the teacher reads the passage out loud, students listen to the thinking-through of the trouble spots using the five strategies mentioned. In Davey's procedure, students are gradually encouraged to take turns reading aloud and sharing their thinking/reasoning process. Eventually readers are encouraged to practice thinking in the same manner when silent reading school materials (selected reading lessons and content area selections). To monitor independent strategy use and stimulate student involvement, Davey recommended use of strategy checklists. The think-aloud to demonstrate text structure strategy use, described by Gordon (1990), followed much the same procedure as Davey's think-aloud, but did not incorporate Davey's five strategies.

Because strategic readers use a number of strategies in any one reading the teacher should start by modeling a few strategies (e.g., predicting, using prior knowledge, or any of the five strategies suggested by Davey) along with the text structure strategy when students have mastered the use of expository text structure strategy *per se*. As students become more proficient, the teacher can add other strategies to those suggested by Davey (1983), such as self-questioning, summarizing and inferencing as necessary with an explanation of the reasoning involved.

## Strategy modeling in a text structure framework

To illustrate the use of the text structure strategy in conjunction with other strategies, here is an example of teacher modeling of reasoning processes when reading a science text at the primary grade level. (See Appendix A for the complete text without teacher modeling.) Here the teacher explains how s/he reasons when using the text structure strategy as a means of organizing information into a coherent framework, the reasoning when using the five strategies in Davey's (1983) think-aloud, and any other strategies relevant to the comprehension of this text. The strategies are stated explicitly and simply for the novice learner in the course of the reasoning and are placed in parentheses (for the reader of this article) in the context of the modeling. The actual words in the selection are underlined. The teacher also begins to involve students in the process by asking the students questions.

*Teacher: I want to show you how I think as I read some information about fish. I want to show you how you can use the organization of an informational selection as well as other strategies to help you understand the selection.*

Teacher reads and thinks aloud:

*The title is A Fish Story, but it must be some true information about fish. It is not really a story. We are taking science and science is supposed to be based on fact so I predict that this piece gives us some information about fish. (Makes a prediction and explains reasoning involved.) Fish lay their eggs in different places. But I have a question. I wonder if all fish do that? Or just some fish? Maybe I'll find the answer as I read on. (Self-questions and expects a qualifier.) There's an important word in this sentence and that word is "different." It says to me that I might think of different places that I already*

know of from past experience, places in which fish would lay their eggs, like on the water, on lily pads, on rocks, and in the mud. I know that because I once saw a program on television about fish. I know, too, that the word different tells me there will be more than one place. So I think that three or four places will be mentioned but in no particular order. I'll have to watch for words like "the first place," and "the second," or words like "then" that I know are used in listing or in sequence. (Makes a prediction on the basis of prior knowledge of content and structure.) Let me keep reading to see if I am right. It says that Some lay their eggs in mud. Others lay their eggs on stones or underwater roots. Still others lay their eggs on top of the water. I was right; the author listed four places but the author did not use the same key words that I thought might help me recognize each different place. The author used some, others and still others and that makes me think there should be three places but the author actually listed four places. So to summarize, the eggs are in mud, on stones, underwater roots, or on top of the water. (Summarizes to get the picture.) It's just like listing all the places in which I might want to hide Easter eggs for an Easter egg hunt because they would have to be in different places and quite well hidden (camouflaged) so they can't be seen — except for the eggs on top of the water. (Makes an analogy and shows reasoning.)

Class, you've been good listeners so far and now I'm going to see if you can help me by answering some of the questions I have in my head as I think out loud. (Teacher begins to involve students more directly even though primary responsibility for modeling is the teacher's.) Let us go to the next paragraph. I read First— and what does this make me ask? Yes, Jack, it makes me ask, is this going to be another list or is the author going to give me a sequence? (Self-questions to monitor strategy use.) Let us read on to find out. (Decides on the strategy to use.) First one fish swims around blowing bubbles. I ask, has this anything to do with building nests? I'm unsure because the author did not give me

the main idea of this paragraph right away. (Self-questions and verbalizes a confusion and the reason for the confusion.) Since I'm reading a new paragraph and I know that each new topic begins with a new paragraph, it is probably a new idea on this topic. What should I do, Cindy? Yes, I'll read ahead and see, as I can't get my answer from what came before. (Chooses a fix-up strategy to follow and states the reason for choosing this one.) Then these bubbles stick together and make a nest. (Demonstrates the use of the repair strategy.) So I was right in guessing these are the steps in building a nest! (Confirms hypothesis made earlier and no longer is confused.) Finally, so OK, I know from my past experience that anytime anyone or anything builds something there is usually an order that is as important as the steps in building a model airplane and I've watched birds building nests too. (Relates new to known and tells how.) What does the word "finally" signal to me? Yes, Brian, the word "finally" signals for me that I will be reading about the last step in how the fish builds a nest. Finally, the bubble nest floats to the top of the water, like an umbrella. I get the picture. It seems to me that it's like a floating umbrella that would have air trapped in it. The nest floats on top of the water because it's made of air. (Forms a mental image based on prior knowledge.) Now let's see if we can remember all the steps in order. (Summarizes to check/monitor comprehension.) Who is willing to try? Go ahead, Tom. (Tom's response is: "First, the fish swims around and blows bubbles; second, the bubbles stick together to form a nest; finally, the nest floats to the top.") I'll bet the next thing I will read about is how the eggs get into the nest. It makes sense that somehow the eggs and the nest have to come together. Let's skip ahead and see. (Makes a prediction, shows the reasoning and demonstrates a strategy to use to enhance comprehension.) How many students found it? Great.

Yes, there it is at the beginning of the last paragraph. Sarah, read it for me. (Sarah reads: Into this bubble nest, the fish puts the eggs that a mother fish has laid.)

*OK, back to the second paragraph. The nest is strong. Wind and waves cannot break it. That is a description of the nest. It is a sentence that tells me just how strong the nest is. We must be talking about fish in a lake or ocean because I know that's where there are waves on the water. With rivers we usually talk about currents. (Explains reasoning on the basis of prior knowledge.) I wonder what makes those bubbles stick together so well? Would the fish secrete some sort of glue when it blows those bubbles? Do we know the answers? How will we find out, Troy? Yes, we might have to read more on fish to find out the answers to those questions. (Self-questions and chooses a strategy to use to get the answer.)*

Modeling the use of a text structure strategy on the last paragraph of *A Fish Story* shows how a reader imposes a structure on a less well-organized text. In this example, students are also involved in a shared teaching responsibility.

*Teacher: In A Fish Story, the last paragraph which I already know starts out by telling me that the fish put the eggs into the nest...OK, Into this bubble nest, the fish puts the eggs that a mother fish has laid. Wait a minute. Susan, you take it from here. Think aloud as you make sense out of this sentence.*

*Susan: I guess it makes me think that a different fish, not the mother fish, put the eggs in the nest. I thought maybe when we started reading this that the mother laid them into a nest.*

*Teacher: OK, so it's a different fish. I wonder if it's the father fish or just any other fish that happens to be around? Jim, read on to see and think aloud as you read.*

*Jim: Then he watches over the nest. I think the word "he" in this sentence tells me if it is a "male" fish, so it's probably the father. That makes sense. There was*

*probably a mother and father in this selection right from the beginning. Yes — here's a clue. In the second paragraph it says "one fish swims around," so there must have been another one there, too. And there are usually two birds, a mother and father, building nests, so why not two fish?*

*Teacher: Excellent. Jim has just made an inference. That's a strategy a good reader uses to figure things out. Jim used what knowledge he already had in his head and he put that information together with information in the text. OK, who wants to add anything to the think-aloud? Colin, your hand was up first.*

*Colin: The sentence says, "Then he watches over the nest." "He" must be the father because it's just like a father in a family, like our moms and dads who share responsibilities, like looking after the kids, doing the cooking or the housework.*

*Teacher: Excellent. Colin used the "like a..." strategy and explained his thinking.*

*Teacher: Now it's my turn to finish reading the text and thinking aloud. He takes care of the eggs. When an egg falls out, the fish puts it back again. Hey, I think it would make more sense to me if I re-ordered those last three ideas because taking care of the eggs is the main idea here and should come first. The others tell how he takes care of eggs. So I say to myself, this is how the fish takes care of the eggs. He watches over them and when one falls out, then he puts it back in. Sometimes a selection is not as well-organized as it could be and then I can use what I know about good organization to fix up the writing as I read along. This strategy helps me to better understand what I am reading.*

The students can use a checklist such as the one shown in Figure 1 for monitoring their reasoning processes during silent reading.

**Figure 1**  
**Self-Evaluation of Multi-Strategy Use**  
*(adapted from Davey, 1983)*

*What did I do while I was reading? (Put a √ in the column that applies.)*

	Not much	A bit	Most of the time	Always
Used text structure				
Made predictions				
Formed pictures				
Used "like a..."				
Found confusions/ problems				
Used "fix-ups" such as rereading, reading ahead				
Summarized				
Self-questioned				
Other strategies I used:				

## Conclusion

As stated in "Modeling an expository text structure strategy in think alouds," published in the previous issue of this journal (Gordon, 1990), teaching students to use their knowledge of text structure through a think-aloud is one method of developing good reading comprehension. However, a strategic reader is aware of not one strategy but of a *repertoire* of strategies (e.g., use of text structure, making predictions, self-questioning, drawing inferences, clarifying confusions) and a competent user of a number of these strategies when and where necessary. Thus, promoting strategic reading by demonstrating the use of a

variety of strategies within a text's structural organization is another way of enhancing student's comprehension of text. In addition in the "expanded text structure strategy" described in this article, student involvement is promoted through shared teaching situations and through techniques to encourage independent application to silent reading.

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### Appendix A: A Fish Story\*

Fish lay their eggs in different kinds of places. Some lay their eggs in mud. Others lay their eggs on stones or underwater roots. Still others lay their eggs on top of the water.

First, one fish swims around blowing bubbles. Then these bubbles stick together and make a nest. Finally, the bubble nest floats to the top of the water, like an umbrella. The nest is strong. Wind and waves cannot break it.

Into this bubble nest, the fish puts the eggs that a mother fish has laid. Then he watches over the nest. He takes care of the eggs. When an egg falls out, the fish puts it back again.

\* source unknown to this author

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