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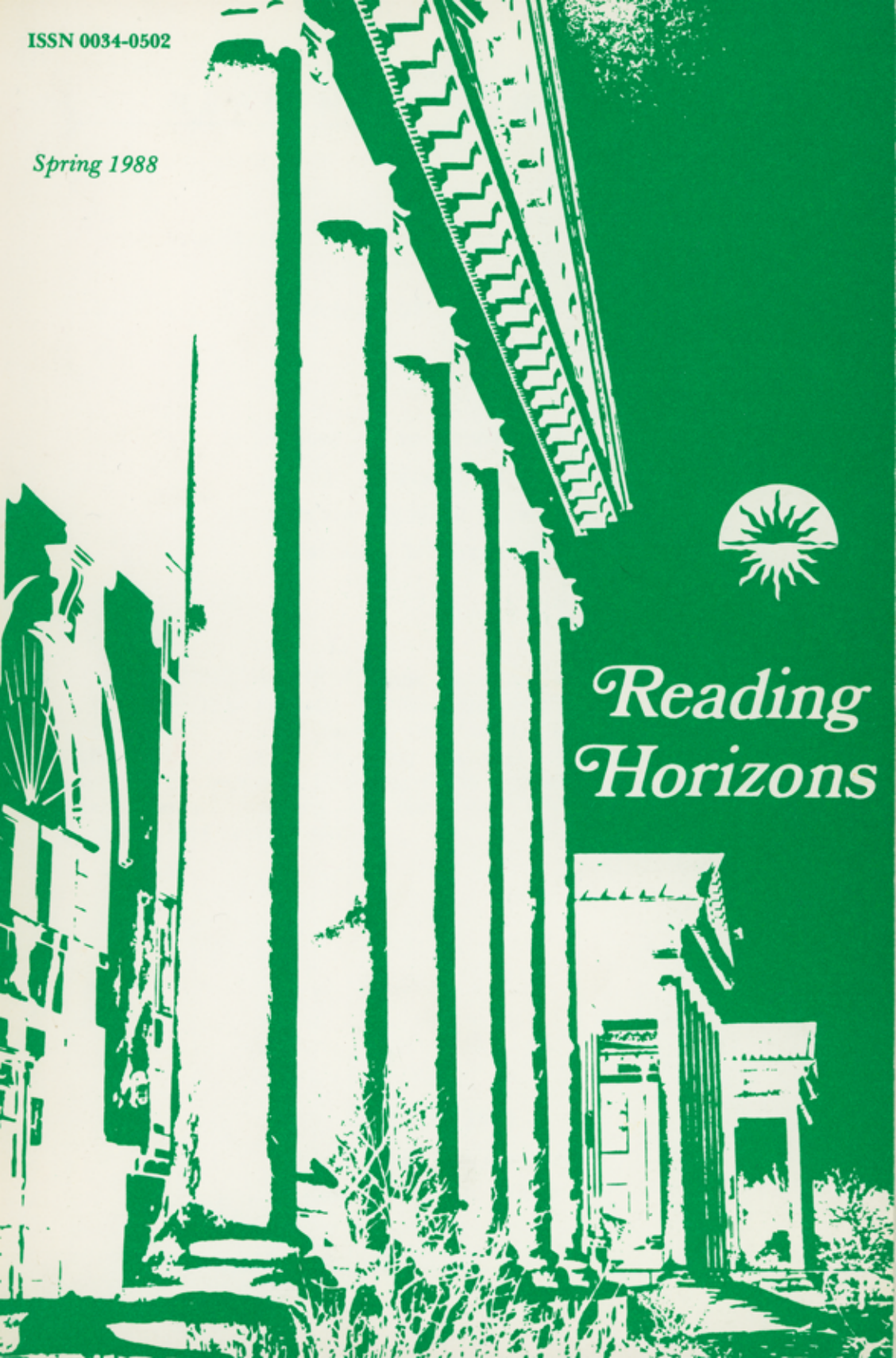


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## STORY GRAMMARS: ARE THEY RELEVANT FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS?

MARY JANE GRAY  
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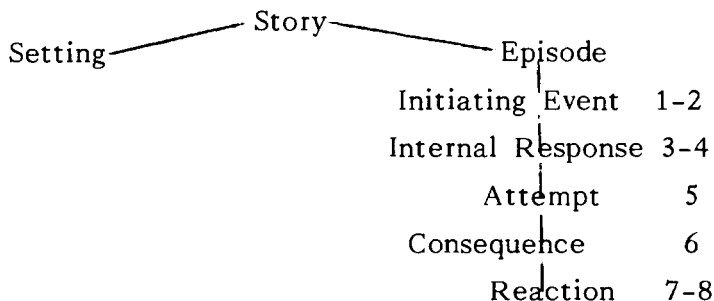
The great amount of comprehension research which has been conducted during the last twenty years has brought to the fore many new terms related to comprehension. To cite just a few, there are schema, comprehension monitoring, interactive processing, microstructure, macrostructure, story grammar, textual analysis, etc. While this area of research has much of value to offer teachers of reading, the number of new terms may overwhelm and discourage them from seriously attempting to acquaint themselves with the new information in the field of comprehension.

The focus of this article will be on one area which has received emphasis during this time, story grammar, and the relevance of this area for reading teachers.

### Story Grammars

A story grammar consists of rules that build a story hierarchy. The major top level components according to Stein and Glenn's example are setting and episode. At the lower levels are the actions of characters which contribute to the solving of a problem and the achieving of a goal. See the figure below.

Figure 1





Source of Figure 1--Nancy Stein & Christine Glenn, "An Analysis of Story Comprehension in Elementary School Children," in New Directions in Discourse Processing Vol. 2, edited by Roy Freedle, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1979.

There are two major categories delineated by Stein and Glenn. These are: Story = Setting + Episode. As the illustration shows, there are five components to the episodes. The initiating event sets the story in motion, causing the main character to react in some manner. The internal response is that character's reaction to that initiating action. The attempts are the actions carried out to attain a goal. Attainment or non attainment of the results of behavior are included under consequence. Finally, the reaction includes the character's response to consequence.

Let's take a look at how a story can work into the story grammar. The sentences in the story are numbered for more efficiency in diagramming and the numbers have been placed on Figure 1 in the appropriate columns.

#### Surprise for Peter

(1)The shadowy form darted back and forth in the back yard. (2)It moved in and out among the trees, bushes, and flowers. (3)Peter was inside the house playing with his toys (4)when he caught sight of this activity. (5)He looked out the window, and (6)the form became more distinct. (7)As he got a clearer view of the form, he laughed with delight (8)to think he had caught the Easter bunny hiding his eggs.

Questions which can be derived to draw attention to the elements of the story include:

Initiating Event--What is happening in Peter's back yard?

Response--How does Peter become aware of this?

Attempt--What does Peter try to do?

Consequence--What did Peter find out?

Reaction--How did Peter feel?

Why did he feel that way?

Would you have felt like Peter? Why or why not?

What does all of this mean for you as a teacher of reading? Is story grammar something else which should be taught? To help move in the direction of an answer to this question, let us look at some of the benefits and limitations of the use of story grammars.

### Benefits

A study conducted by Gordon and Braun (1982) had as a major purpose the investigation of effects of story schema training on reading comprehension and writing. It was hypothesized that direct instruction in story structure would increase the number of text structure categories not usually present in children's recall after a narrative used in instruction, and that such instructional effects would transfer to the reading of an unfamiliar but similarly organized narrative. It was also hypothesized that story schema (structure schemata) awareness would contribute significantly to literal and inferential comprehension if prior knowledge on the topic (content schemata) is developed to the same extent in both treatment groups (p. 263).

Fifty-seven fifth graders from one school population were the subjects in this study. It was found that the experimental group did recall significantly more text structure categories than did the control group as evidenced through a written recall of a new selection. It was also shown that while both groups had their background knowledge (content schemata) on the topic developed right before testing, the group who had been trained in story structure awareness had more correct answers than did the control group. Thus, the results of this study would seem to encourage instruction in story grammar.

Bruce (1978) feels failure to understand story structure could be an important factor in reading disability. He stresses the importance of giving children well formed material and points out many stories for beginners sacrifice the story line in order to teach important skills.

Morrow (1978) demonstrated the truth of this in a recent study which examined the story structures in selections of basal readers. He found three structures were the most common--confrontation, episodic, and

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plotless. The three series with the greater emphasis on decoding skills had a higher percentage of plotless stories; the three that emphasized language and literature had more stories with emphasis on plot structure.

Asking a child to retell a story provides a very good means of determining the child's understanding of story structure. Through this procedure the teacher can determine what may be the child's view of the story and what s/h may be eliminating or adding to the story which may interfere with meaning.

A suggestion by Marshall (1983) to use questions based on story grammar to check comprehension can be very beneficial to children and teachers. It can help children learn what to look for in stories, thus assisting them in gaining a better understanding of what they have read. For the teacher in formulating these questions, it becomes evident which stories seem to fit into the story grammar mold and it is easier to evaluate the stories children are asked to read from a basal reader. It should assist in more effective text evaluation and selection. Marshall's suggestions are general enough to be adapted to fit any story grammar frame. They are as follows:

Theme: What is the major point of the story?  
 What is the moral of the story?  
 What did \_\_\_\_\_ learn at the end of the story?

Setting: Where did \_\_\_\_\_ happen?  
 When did \_\_\_\_\_ happen?

Character: Who is the main character?  
 What is \_\_\_\_\_ like?

Initiating

Events: What is \_\_\_\_\_'s problem?  
 What does \_\_\_\_\_ have to try to do?

Attempts: What did \_\_\_\_\_ do about \_\_\_\_\_?  
 What will \_\_\_\_\_ do now?

Resolution: How did \_\_\_\_\_ solve the problem?  
 How did \_\_\_\_\_ achieve the goal?  
 What would you do to solve \_\_\_\_\_'s problem?

Reactions: How did \_\_\_\_\_ feel about the problem?  
 Why did \_\_\_\_\_ do \_\_\_\_\_?  
 How did \_\_\_\_\_ feel at the end?

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Why did \_\_\_\_\_ feel that way?

How would you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?

If we think about a story which is familiar to all of us, let us see what questions could be incorporated. Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter has been selected for this exercise.

Theme: What did Peter learn at the end of the story?

Setting: Where did the story take place?

Character: Who is the main character? What is s/he like?

Initiating

Event: What is Peter's problem?

What does Peter have to try to do?

Attempts: What did Peter do about going into Mr. McGregor's garden?

Resolution: How did Peter solve his problem?

What would you have done if you had been Peter?

Reaction: How did Peter feel at the end?

Why did he feel that way?

How do you feel about the way Peter's mother treated him?

Why did Peter do what he did?

Both the formation of these questions and the answering of them force attention to elements of story structure. It is important that teachers keep in mind--a reader's knowledge of story seems to benefit both her/his comprehensions of the story and memory for the story.

### Limitations

Dreher and Singer (1980) wanted to determine whether teaching intermediate grade students to identify structure of a story would improve their ability to recall a story. They found that fifth graders can learn to identify structure of a story as indicated by their ability to categorize story information into appropriate grammatical structures. The investigators felt that it is not necessary to teach this strategy, however, since learning to identify structure explicitly does not increase the amount or type of story information that students recall.

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Sebesta, Calder, and Cleland (1982) point out that because story grammars are so precise and detailed, they are somewhat difficult to teach. They go on to say that perhaps that is the reason research regarding the effect to comprehension has not yielded consistent beneficial results.

Another limitation is the fact that only a limited range of stories can be represented by story grammars, so a recommendation for teaching them would be difficult to justify.

Additionally, besides looking at text structure, it is essential to look at the structure the reader imposed on the text. No two teachers approach a text with the same background and thus, the same perspective. Each of us has a certain perspective from which we read the text and make interpretations. While the final interpretations should not be widely discrepant, use of story grammars does not provide for considering varying reader perspectives. Teachers must remember that older children have a better schema for stories than do younger children. We do not yet know how and under what conditions this awareness of story schema develops. Part of it may be developmental in that older children have more experience with both typical and discrepant structures. The more experience we have with various forms of discourse, the easier it becomes to build a general framework in which to fit each of these.

### Summary

While knowledge of story structure is of benefit to the reader in understanding and remembering the story, teaching this structure may not be the best way, and surely should not be the ONLY way, to arrive at understanding. The fact that this knowledge appears to be developmental is something teachers must be aware of. The brief overview of the benefits and limitations given here, along with some suggestions for implementation in the classroom should help to further acquaint reading teachers with the process of story grammar instruction. Whether or not teachers decide to implement instruction in this area for their students, knowledge of its operation can be of value to them. In this, as in many procedures,

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selective adaptation by teachers may serve to enhance their instruction in reading.

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## FIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY AS A PROCESS

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Building vocabulary is an important component of any reading program; it is a crucial comprehension skill. In fact, Davis (1968), in an analysis of comprehension skills, found word knowledge to be the key factor in comprehension. However, vocabulary has often been relegated to a secondary position in the scheme of language development, and no real systematic program for vocabulary building in reading or language arts course really exists (O'Rourke, 1974). Additionally, the approaches to vocabulary study have long emphasized product over process (Brooks, 1986). Students have been presented with long lists of often unrelated terms that they could study and memorize for a test only to purposefully forget them following the quiz. Yet, readers need to expand their vocabulary range, and speakers require an ever increasing number of specific terms to communicate fully and effectively at various levels. How then does the teacher incorporate vocabulary study into the classroom? A few process oriented strategies seem to be the answer for meaningful vocabulary development and retention. In this paper, five strategies for vocabulary as a process are provided.

### **Teach Words in Context**

In teaching vocabulary, it is important to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. One way of nurturing vocabulary development and retention is to teach words in context (Kruse, 1979). Divorcing words from their surroundings decreases the likelihood of comprehension and retention. Students need to be made aware of the total linguistic environment in which a word or phrase appears. This provides valuable input which aids in comprehension and eventually assists in the development of syntac-



tic knowledge. In addition, the teacher can begin to model strategies for utilizing contextual clues. Such strategies could possible enhance reading comprehension capability.

To tap into student interest and motivate learners, have students provide the context. Brooks (1986) describes a process whereby students contribute the vocabulary words to be studied from their own reading or listening world. They not only volunteer the word and its source, but also the context, sentence or phrase, within which the item occurs. The teacher can introduce these student initiated items in a variety of ways. A word for the day can be listed on the board, or a running list of words can be compiled on a large poster or piece of paper for the entire class to view and add to. These words and the context then become part of the students' work bank.

### **Move From Known to Unknown**

The next suggestion follows logically. Teachers should introduce new words in already known structures, moving from known to unknown. When students are bombarded with too many new items in new contexts, they become overwhelmed. Their understanding diminishes, and they tend to focus on memorization rather than comprehension. However, when new word use is introduced amidst familiar structures and content, comprehension increases. Having students volunteer words from their own familiar environment increases comprehensibility. Students can begin to keep their own notebook of vocabulary items drawn from personal reading or writing. In fact, vocabulary instruction should frequently center on individual needs as in words drawn from student writing.

### **Group and Categorize Items**

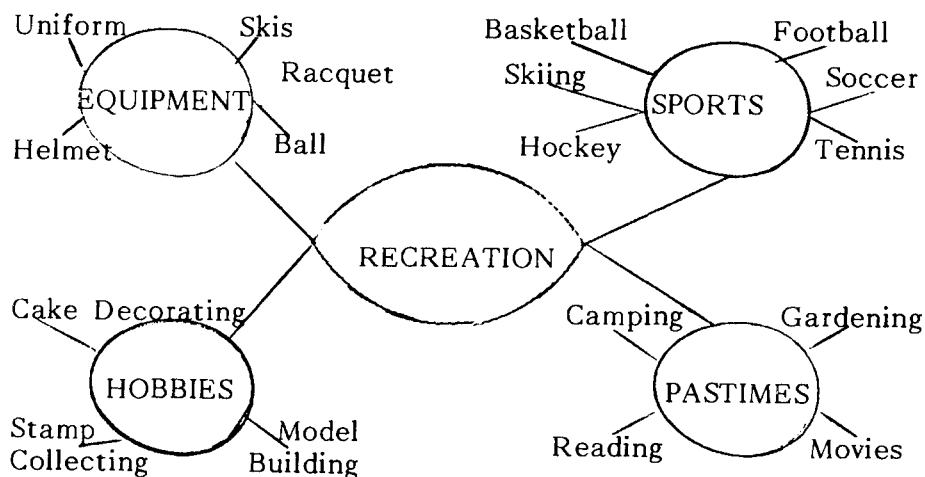
Grouping items into topical or thematic areas also enhances vocabulary development. Advocates of this type of grouping (Haycraft, 1978; Krashen & Terell, 1983) stress that thematic vocabulary units encourage students to form a network of interrelationships among the items. Alphabetized or unrelated lists of words do not facilitate discovery of the organizational pattern which relates the items.

Linking items in a semantic framework can be encouraged through the technique of webbing or semantic mapping.

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(See Figure 1, below.) The teacher starts with a central word or theme for the unit, and the students build on this core by calling out the words that are associated. For instance, a unit on recreation can be broadened into subcategories such as hobbies, sports, or pastimes. These subcategories can be further expanded by specifically listing typical hobbies or sports (nouns) or by noting sporting activities (verbs). Semantic maps are effective alternatives to traditional prereading activities in that they introduce new vocabulary as well as tapping into students' previous knowledge and conceptual background. Pre-reading webs can also be extended after reading to focus on the main points of the story (Personke & Johnson, 1987). This technique is also an excellent pre-writing strategy to generate vocabulary prior to writing. For more advanced students, teachers can employ vocabulary webs to introduce symbolic or figurative language. As in the case of the word 'house' as a central core, there are both literal associations, rooms and furniture, which can be developed, as well as symbolic connotations, love, family, security. Webbing them visually reinforces the multiple meanings of vocabulary items.

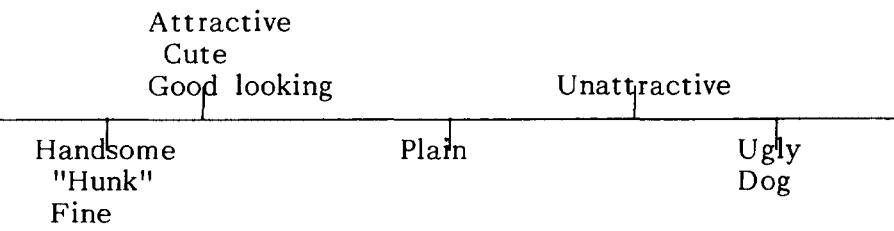
Figure 1  
Vocabulary Web



The use of a continuum (Figure 2) can also pictorially represent concepts and shades of meaning. The class rank

orders adjectives along the continuum from best to worst, strongest to weakest, or informal to formal language. Valuable class discussion can emerge surrounding the placement of words on the continuum, and this can also contribute to student understanding of the power of contexts.

Figure 2  
Continuum



Vocabulary grids (Figure 3) are another technique for stressing the interrelatedness of definitions (Harvey, 1983). A grid for vocabulary associated with sports can be developed with various categories such as equipment, location, and time divisions. Then students can work together to fill in all the appropriate vocabulary associated with each grid.

Figure 3  
Vocabulary Grid

SPORTS	EQUIPMENT	LOCATION	TIME DIVISION
Tennis	Racquet Ball	Court	Match
Baseball	Bat Base Ball Helmet Glove Mitt	Diamond Mound Infield Outfield	Inning Double Header
Basketball	Ball Hoop	Court	Half

As the class spirals back to and expands previous vocabulary, students may come up with new groupings within the subject area or across theme groups. For instance, a unit on clothing, my introduce men's and women's clothing items. Later study of the weather can bring in seasonal clothing.

Another technique which could utilize grouping is a

word bank. Students write each new word on a separate notecard; they may then sort the cards into any number of organizational groupings. Thus, word banks, webs, grids, and continuums can all expand student vocabulary by stressing related terms.

### **Relate Content to Students' Interests**

Another important consideration in vocabulary instruction is student interest. Hooking onto individual interests and backgrounds can enhance vocabulary development (Finocchiaro, 1974). Students are motivated when they acquire words and expressions which can be put to immediate use in everyday communication. To gather initial information on students, teachers could use an interest inventory at the beginning of the semester. Items such as hobbies, abilities, clubs, places lived, travels, and favorite food, music, or celebrities can serve as starting points for classroom activities. Teachers can then have students scan real world texts such as menus, fashion, movie, or music magazines, and travel brochures for vocabulary items. In fact, scavenger hunts can be created with vocabulary of interest to students. They can search for sources which would contain specific types of words.

Another means of promoting student interest in vocabulary development is to provide more personalized assignments to excite and motivate their learning. A unit on the family could incorporate a poster of the students' family tree, or a family scrapbook with actual photos and a written description of each member. Instructional activities for the house could include a floor plan of the students' real home or their dream home. Clothing items can be taught via a fashion show, or a compilation of a clothing catalog with pictures, descriptions, and prices of items. The possibilities are endless, but the object is to put actual vocabulary to use in the students' world and to highlight each student's special talent or interests in the language learning process.

### **Provide for Constant Review**

Finally, frequent, almost continual review of vocabulary after the initial presentation is crucial. The teacher must continue to weave new words into the lessons and

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units in order to expose students to lexical items that can be acquired and to provide a knowledge base for understanding the text. Too often vocabulary words are presented in the text or instructional unit and are never repeated, making it difficult for students to understand and retain. Thus, teachers must analyze curricular material for such shortcomings and adjust instructional efforts to include constant repetition of vocabulary. The class must talk about the new vocabulary items, encounter them in reading, and be encouraged to utilize them in writing after the first initial introduction. Individuals seldom incorporate new items into their word memory after only one exposure (Judd, 1978). Once students discover new words they might keep a personal list of especially useful items to include in their personal writing or to refer to for reading in specific areas.

The teaching of vocabulary is receiving new emphasis in the teaching of reading and writing. The key to successful vocabulary development appears to lie in providing students with relevant and useful input and using language as a process. This can be accomplished by presenting items in context and within known structures. Emphasis on vocabulary work should also include items of relevance to students in order to ensure their incorporation into the students' active vocabulary.

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## HELPING PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN

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Reading specialists are often besieged by calls from frantic parents. "What can I do? My child is having trouble with . . . " Many times, a long conversation follows in which, consistently, one fact emerges--the parent, genuinely concerned about the child's problem, wants to know something specific and concrete to do. We usually suggest the procedure of having the child's problems diagnosed and followed up by prescriptive instruction, either in the classroom or through a clinic or tutor. Still, though, many parents are not satisfied. They feel very concerned about their child's problems and want to know about something they can do. For many parents, the best answer is "nothing," but others are so emotionally involved that they need to know something concrete to do. What, then, are some techniques that the reading specialist can teach parents to do?

Such techniques need, in most cases, to be fairly simple and structured. The specialist should also try to get to know the parents before making recommendations. However, the literature reveals several techniques that meet these criteria and that parents can learn to help their children. (While these ideas are directed toward parents here, they could be used by para-professionals and volunteers as well.) The remainder of this article will focus on a sample of these techniques in various skills areas of reading.

### Letter or Word Recognition

Parents can learn Grace Fernald's old remedial VAKT technique. There are filmstrips available for teaching parents (Brook, 1976) or a handout with a half-hour training session might be used. Perhaps the best use of this activity

is for the teacher or reading specialist to send home a very small number of words (in the range of one to five) per week for parents and children to learn through VAKT. By tracing it in crayon, writing in string or tracing in a sand tray, parent and child can say the words, trace them and practice until visual memory is perfect. Word cards can be kept for review every three or four weeks.

### High Frequency Word Recognition

Parents might modify the Words on the Wall technique (Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore, 1983) to help their youngsters master recognition of high frequency words. The teacher should supply a list of words to be learned from sight (from basals, sight word lists, content area units, etc.). Over a period of a couple of weeks, the child could choose a few words to learn each night. The parent writes them on scraps of paper, index cards, or memo sheets. Together, they say the word and use it in several sentences. Then they place the word cards on the wall (or refrigerator with magnets or a flannel board, or a piece of cardboard) so that they can continually be kept in alphabetical order. Every few nights, the parent gives a "spelling" test of five words, but the child is allowed to look at the words. Through these many repetitions, the words should soon be learned.

### Comprehension

Anthony Manzo's Guided Reading Procedure (1975) can be a helpful technique for parents and child to work on comprehension, either in content areas or narrative reading practice. Teachers might suggest this technique to parents whose children can decode but have difficulty with literal comprehension, but they should be certain that the material the children will be reading with their parents is at least an instructional level and about a topic with which the student has some familiarity. With these cautions in mind, the technique can be used in much the same way it is used in the classroom. The parent would briefly introduce a short to normal length assignment, have the youngster read silently, record in writing what s/he can retell about the reading, have the child reread to correct and verify information, organize the data for easier recall, and finally check comprehension with a short oral quiz. The technique should definitely not be a nightly ritual; once a

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week should be the limit. This same technique may be adapted for listening by having the print read to the child.

### Vocabulary Development

An easy, game-like vocabulary technique suggested by Kaplan and Tuchman (1980) can be modified for use by parents to study vocabulary. The teacher might send home a list of words related to a unit about to be studied in class. The parents and child then take the list and read it over briefly. Then, with a one or two-minute time limit, the child writes (or dictates if very young) as many words as s/he can think of that relate to the listed words. After some brief discussion, the youngster writes or dictates sentences or a paragraph that include as many of the listed and suggested words as possible. The words might then be placed in a file box or on a poster for future review.

### Impress Methods

If children need to improve their understanding of the relationships of print to oral language, impress methods that combine hearing language while simultaneously seeing and reading print can be used by the parent. To do this activity, the parent and child sit close together while the parent reads a story aloud. The child reads along just slightly behind the rate of the parent. The parent and/or child may move his/her index finger along the print. The sessions should stop before the youngster becomes fatigued and may be varied slightly according to different authorities (Carbo, 1978; Heckleman, 1969; Hollingsworth, 1970).

### Improved Decoding

Repeated readings and imitative reading can make decoding more automatic and therefore eventually improve comprehension. The parent would use repeated reading by timing the child's reading of a passage selected by the teacher, perhaps from a book and record or cassette combination. The reader then practices with the recording until it can be read more fluently. The parent then retimes and checks comprehension and, if improvement has occurred to a rate of approximately 85 words per

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minute, the child moves to another reading. If not, practice continues. Imitative reading is similar, except that the child listens to the tape and follows the book for as many times as necessary until the story can be read without the text. At that point, the parent notes word recognition and comprehension problems and sends a note to the teacher for follow-up or a new assignment.

### Model Reading

The technique of Sustained Silent Reading (Hunt, 1971; McCracken, 1971), so useful to many teachers may help parents model reading for their children. It would be used in homes essentially the same way that it is in classrooms. At a designated time and for a specific period on a certain number of days, everyone in the household would read self-chosen materials; very young children or non-reading older ones might look at books. Care should be taken that the period is short enough to be pleasurable for everyone. However, having everyone involved in reading on a regular basis can be a very helpful technique that all parents can do with their youngsters.

### General Textbook Study

As students reach the middle grades they are often expected to read and study independently. Parents can help them develop or improve these skills by using the PQ 4 R technique (Thomas and Robinson, 1977). This technique stands for five study steps designated as preview, question, read and reflect, recite, and review. The teacher might duplicate handouts such as the following:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Book \_\_\_\_\_

Pages \_\_\_\_\_

Preview: Oral; use headings, beginning and ending paragraphs, pictures, charts, etc. to get a general idea of the assignment

Question: Use the headings, bold face type, italics, headings and/or first and last paragraphs to make

questions. Jot down a few good ones here.

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**Read and Reflect:** Read each section of the assignment silently. Think about the answers to the question. Reread if confused.

**Recite:** Say the answers to the most important questions to your parent(s).

**Review:** Briefly go over the steps above, especially the trouble spots, with parent(s).

We have studied this assignment together.

Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Questions or Comments:

The student and parents could then follow the technique, if the material is not extremely difficult for the youngster. If a severe reading problem exists, the same general procedures might be followed with the parent reading to the child while he listens and does the steps.

All of these strategies are ones that parents should be able to learn easily and ones that should not interfere with the classroom teacher's instruction. Yet, with a little planning and training, they can answer the parents' pleas for "What can I do to help my child?"

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## INFORMAL READING INVENTORY COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: ARE CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES VALID?

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An area of controversy in reading diagnosis and instruction is that of the nature of comprehension. Questions have been raised about varied thinking skills employed during the comprehension of text. Is comprehension a unitary process? Or, is comprehension composed of different abilities based on the complexity of thought processes required?

This issue has been addressed by researchers, practitioners, and theorists. There appear to be two points that can be made after reading relevant literature:

(1) respected professionals from a variety of related disciplines do not agree on the nature of reading comprehension and (2) in spite of this lack of agreement and the absence of data consistently substantiating differentiated comprehension skills, both instructional and testing materials include comprehension strategies based on predetermined classification schemes.

Some standardized testing materials, such as, the widely-used Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (1975) use different comprehension question types. Furthermore, informal diagnostic test developers suggest that comprehension skill profiles, that is, patterns of strengths and weaknesses across question types, be used in planning corrective or remedial instruction. The Informal Reading Inventory (Burns and Roe, 1985) and Classroom Reading Inventory (Silvaroli, 1982) are informal reading assessment tools that measure comprehension with items classified according to the developers' question types.

As previously stated, research on separate comprehension skills has presented conflicting findings. Davis (1944)

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identified two major components of reading comprehension. In later studies (1968, 1972) Davis confirmed his earlier findings and reported that additional components of comprehension had been identified. Other researchers (Hunt, 1957; Spearritt, 1972) reported findings that, in their conclusions, substantiated Davis' results. Conflicting opinions, however, also based on research results, were presented by Harris (1948) and by Thorndike (1973-1974).

More recently, researchers have continued to disagree about reading tests' ability to measure, or even identify separate comprehension skills. While some researchers (Klein, 1979, 1980, 1981; Royer & Lynch, 1982) report that reading tests are not able to differentiate among specific comprehension skills, other investigators conclude that reading tests do have this capability (Blair and Rath, 1978; Crowell & Au, 1981).

In order to clarify the issue of comprehension question types, the authors of this report undertook an investigation to study comprehension testing in an original informal test. The JAT Reading Inventory (JAT) had been developed as part of a larger diagnostic instrument, The Progressive Reading Portfolio (Joels, Anderson, and Thompson, 1983), and consisted of graded passages across reading levels one through eight. Assessment procedures had been developed using arbitrarily classified comprehension questions and the investigators wanted to determine the extent to which these questions measure students' strengths and weaknesses in comprehension abilities.

Previous studies (Anderson and Joels, 1984-85 and in press) had provided data related to other aspects of test scoring and instructional level validity of the JAT. In addition, discriminant validity of the JAT as a diagnostic instrument appears to be established by the fact that it did yield widely varying results when administered to a heterogeneous population. The JAT established the following instructional reading levels for students in grade placements two through five: grade 2, below grade 1 to 4; grade 3, below grade 1 to 4; grade 4, below grade 1 to 6; and grade 5, below grade 1 to 8. Subjects obtained the following percentile rank ranges on a standardized test administered five months after the JAT testing: grade 2, 15-95; grade 3, 19-98; grade 4, 5-19; and

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grade 5, 9-96. Thus, it appears that the JAT is sensitive to individual student's overall reading achievement.

However, one feature of the instrument that had not been investigated was the comprehension classification scheme in which the developers had categorized questions into four types: literal, inference, vocabulary, and application. In spite of a lack of validation evidence, the JAT's question types were defined in the administration procedures as assessing different thinking skills required by the reader in order to derive meaning from text. Literal question, for example, required that meaning be obtained from explicitly stated information. Inference called for the reader to infer or interpret meaning. Vocabulary questions necessitated correct definitions of words, often not contextually explained. Application questions involved the manipulation or evaluation of textual elements, for example, creatively altering or critically judging the text or solving a problem.

### The Study

Students in grades two through five, selected randomly from two central Florida public elementary schools, were tested on Form A JAT passages by the authors and a trained graduate assistant. A total of 136 test protocols were analyzed for comprehension question responses.

TABLE I. Question Type Accuracy % on Each Passage

Passage Level	N*	Literal	Inference	Vocabulary	Application
1	60	86	67	89	69
2	90	71	55	62	76
3	105	84	94	47	82
4	91	47	67	79	66
5	58	51	55	52	47
6	26	70	52	38	59
7	10	62	82	42	85
8	6	44	58	33	70

(\*N = number of students tested on that passage level.)

Table 1 shows the question type accuracy means that were computed for all students tested on each passage level. Differences among question types are apparent across the passage levels. However, informal inventories are not designed from group interpretation. Results, therefore, are not intended to be used to derive group performance indicators, such as, means, ranges, or medians.

Informal reading inventories are designed for individual diagnostic testing and for interpretation relevant for subsequent instructional planning. Most important, therefore, are data on individual student performances. If meaningful differences are found across assessed constructs, corrective or remedial teaching can more effectively be planned and implemented.

There were 38 students whose instructional reading levels were determined to be two to four levels below their current grade placements. In this instrument, instructional reading level is defined as the highest passage reading level at which a student concurrently obtains a minimum of 95% word recognition accuracy and a minimum of 70% comprehension accuracy. Using these obtained scores, it appears that approximately one-third of the student group tested would be considered candidates for corrective or remedial reading instruction. When these individuals' scores on question types are studied, one does discern strengths and weaknesses across the comprehension question types.

Specifically, 31 of the 38 poor readers scored below 60% accuracy in at least one of the question type categories. Similarly, only five of these same students failed to achieve accuracy equal to or exceeding 75% in at least one of the question types. To reiterate, almost all these individual poor readers showed marked differences in their abilities to obtain meaning as measured by the classified questions.

Six representative students' performances across the four question types are shown in Table 2. Students are listed according to their instructional reading level/grade placement discrepancies. Scores for two students who had an achievement/placement discrepancy of -2 are depicted. The first of these students had a comprehension accuracy of 92% on the literal questions across all levels on which

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Table 2  
Individual Representative Students'  
Question Type Accuracy Percentage

Grade Placement/ Instruc- tional Level Discrepancy	Literal	Inference	Vocab ulary	Appli- cation	Differ ence
-2	92	46	42	56	50
-2	42	100	67	67	58
-3	81	85	61	47	38
-3	61	57	61	94	37
-4	56	78	50	100	50
-4	90	58	50	72	40

tests were administered and a 46% accuracy for the inference questions similarly assessed; these scores resulted in a difference of 50 points between this student's strongest and weakest (that is, highest and lowest) comprehension question types. The other representative student with an achievement/placement discrepancy of -2 had a difference of 58 between highest and lowest obtained scores on the comprehension questions. This student had the highest score on inference and the lowest on literal questions, however.

As further illustrated in Table 2, two representative students with achievement/placement discrepancies of three levels (i.e., -3) had question type performance differences of 38 and 37. Students with achievement/placement differences of -4 had comprehension type accuracy differences of 50 and 40.

These types of data are useful to classroom teachers who administer informal reading inventories in order that results can be used for instructional planning. A logical follow-up study is needed to investigate the effectiveness of instruction in the specific comprehension skill weaknesses. An experimental study would indicate the usefulness of diagnostic testing as a prelude to improving a student's reading comprehension.

### Conclusion

Discriminant validity of the JAT as a diagnostic instrument appears to be established, at least in the extent to which it yields varying results for poor readers across the comprehension question types. Classification question types appear to be valid assessment techniques in determining poor achievers' specific comprehension skills' strengths and weaknesses. This conclusion is based on the apparent differential responsiveness of the question types to students who have special needs in reading instruction. The appropriateness of these patterns of comprehension skills as aids to planning effective corrective or remedial work cannot be determined in a study of this nature, requiring further investigation in an experimental design.

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## READING CHOICES OF NATIVE CHILDREN-- AN INFORMAL ANALYSIS

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We teachers, librarians and parents are concerned about helping our children develop good reading habits. We know that children learn to read by reading (Huck, 1979) and that children's reading interests mature as they do (Purves and Beach, 1976). Studies of reading interests tell us that children like concrete stories about the familiar, and books they can relate to. From this information follows a reasonable assumption that Alaskan children will choose books about Alaska--her people, environment, animals and landscapes.

For several years I have been compiling a bibliography of children's books about Alaska. The bibliography has become quite extensive, and has been published by the Department of Education as part of the Elementary Language Arts Curriculum (Alaska DOE, 1986). Still, as I collect and read the books, I wonder what kids think about them.

Many librarians in the state have put a great deal of money and effort into adding to their collections of "children's Alaskana." One reason for this is the common assumption that Native children in particular may be enticed to read about familiar cultures and places in these books. Because previous research has indicated that children are not influenced by the ethnicity or culture of book characters when choosing books to read (Spangler, 1981), I have begun to wonder if spending so much time and money on children's Alaskana is worth it.

In this study, I chose to look at reading lists of Native children in one Alaskan school to see if any preferences toward books about Alaskan people were evident. These lists were compared to those of non-Native students. The

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results may be useful to professionals when buying books and making recommendations about books for Native children.

### The Project

This research was based on data collected by teachers and parent volunteers in a Juneau elementary school. Two teachers had received a federal Chapter 2 mini-grant to implement a reading incentive program they designed called "I Read 50 Books." All children in the school participated. Following reading a book, each child would turn in a form signed by a parent verifying that the book had been read. These titles were then compiled in reading lists for each child. When the child had read 50 books, a T-shirt emblazoned with "I READ 50 BOOKS" was awarded.

Grant funds were used to buy T-shirts and other promotional materials and to add books with Alaska content to the library. Volunteers compiled reading lists for each child.

The project offered me data on the recreational reading choices of a large number of children. In analyzing the booklists, I was able to find answers to my question: how popular are books about Alaska to Native and non-Native children?

The children: I found booklists for 335 children grades K-5 who had attended the school in 1985-86. Seventy-two of the children (21%) were identified by their teachers as Native.

The books: Children chose reading books from the school or public library or from home. A list of the "children's Alaskana" which was added to the library is included in the appendix. In defining "children's Alaskana", I had to limit my analysis to books with cultural content--that is, my criteria for including a book for analysis was that it included people and had something to do with Alaska. As a result, a large number of books about animals were not included in the study.

What I looked for: I had reading lists for each of the children who attended the school in the 1985-86 school year. I went over each reading list to identify the following information--1) all "children's Alaskana" read; 2) other general reading choice trends; 3) all children who received the "I Read 50 Books" award and all children

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who did not read any books.

### What I Found

Incentive Program: Ninety children, (27% of all children who attended the school that year) read 50 or more books. Twelve of these children were Native. Twenty-two children (6.5% of children who attended the school that year) did not read any books. Eight of the children who did not record any books read were Native. This table summarizes the breakdown of Native and non-Native readers:

	<u>Total Children</u>	<u>Read 50 Books</u>	<u>Read No Books</u>
Native	72	12 (16.5%)	8 (11%)
Non-Native	263	78 (29%)	14(5%)
	335	90 (27%)	22 (6.5%)

### "Children's Alaskana" Books Chosen by Native Children ( n = 72)

- 1st A Salmon for Simon (2)  
The Gnome from Nome (2)
- 2nd King Island Christmas (9)
- 3rd The Secred Moose (3)
- 4th The Art of the Northwest Coast Indians
- 5th Balto the Sled Dog

(The numbers in the left margin indicate the lowest grade level at which the book was chosen. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of times a book was chosen.)

### "Children's Alaskana" Chosen by a Matched Sample of non-Native Children: (n = 72)

- |                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1st <u>A Salmon for Simon</u> (4) | 4th <u>Klondike Arthur</u> |
| <u>Secret Moose</u> (5)           | 5th <u>Mary of Mile 18</u> |
| <u>King Island Christmas</u> (11) | <u>The Gnome from</u>      |
| 2nd <u>Berry Woman's Children</u> | <u>Nome</u>                |
| <u>Alaska ABC Book</u>            | <u>Hannah's Alaska</u>     |
| 3rd <u>Cremation of Sam McGee</u> | <u>The White Archer</u>    |
| <u>Eskimo Songs and Stories</u>   | <u>Kiana's Iditarod</u>    |

"Children's Alaskana" were read a total of 18 times by Native children as compared to 30 times by a matched group of non-Native children.

### Discussions and Conclusions

My first impression of this data was that the incentive program was very successful. The fact that over a quarter of all the children in the school read 50 or more books was most impressive. Some of the children read up to 100 books!

I found a bulletin board at the school with photographs of the children receiving their T-shirts. The proud, beaming faces in the pictures were clear testimony that the program was successful. All the teachers participated in the program too, and a number of them received T-shirts as well.

The program was less successful per capita with the Native children (See the chart above.) However, with a sixth of the Native children reading 50 or more books, any stereotypes that Native children are not voracious readers are not supported by this data.

The "children's Alaskana" was not more attractive to the Native children. In fact, in this small sample, the non-Native kids chose Alaskana more often. This finding is similar to research done with children of other minority ethnic groups in the United States. Content analysis done by the Council on Interracial Books for Children generally tells us that books with ethnic content are often unauthentic, stereotypical, and written by white Americans. These generalizations may hold for the "children's Alaskana." If that is true, maybe it is better that our Native children are not reading culturally inappropriate books.

I was surprised at how few of the Alaska books were actually read by the children. This may be because many of the books are typically read to classes by teachers and the librarian. (For example, Berry Woman's Children and On Mother's Lap are very popular read-alouds.) Perhaps the books are boring compared to more popular books by Judy Blume or Paula Danziger, or series such as "The Berenstain Bears," "Care Bears," and "Choose Your Own Adventure." Finally, there are still relatively few Alaska books to choose from (Alaska Department of Education,

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1986), and the small numbers of them read may reflect a similar proportion of Alaska titles to all children's books available to these kids.

Three Alaska books were read frequently: A Salmon for Simon, The Secret Moose, and King Island Christmas. This is probably due to the high quality of these books. Jean Rogers, the author of the latter two books, was a weekly visitor to the school, so her presence was probably influential.

The children at this school read a large number of books about animals, particularly whales, other sea mammals and most of all bears. I was amazed at the number of bear books (about real bears and fantasy bears) that were chosen. The impact of living in a town where bears commonly roam the streets in the fall is clearly shown in these children's reading interests.

I also noted several instances of "I Read 50 Book" club members with the same last name, so I assumed there were from the same families. This shows again the powerful influence parents have on children's reading habits.

This informal look at a group of children's reading makes me wonder if all the energy expended on buying children's Alaskana is worth it for the children. Only four of the books the teachers bought with their grant money were read (The Fur Seals of the Pribilofs, Walpole, Mary of Mile 18, and The White Archer). In addition, the results of this informal case study provide no support for the assumption that Native children (or non-Native children) are particularly attracted to these books, or that providing Alaskana can influence reading behavior.

Instead, it seems that children of all ethnic groups are best served when teachers, parents and librarians choose the best of books for our children, regardless of cultural content. The study does indicate that modern, culturally sensitive portrayals of Native culture (such as King Island Christmas) and books about common Alaska animals are widely read by both Native and non-Native Alaskan children.

If we think that "children's Alaskana" is important,

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we are going to have to lead children to the books through reading out loud, booktalking, meetings with authors, class assignments, discussions and other activities that may help the children appreciate what Alaskana has to offer. And hopefully, more writers will emerge from our state who are both sensitive and accurate, and will provide books that will appeal to all children, here and in the rest of the country.

Note: Keep in mind that this information was generalized from information from one school. It may not represent other schools in the state. What we need here is more data from other Alaskan schools. If you are aware of a school where comprehensive reading lists are kept, please let me know so we can begin to compile more information on the topic of Alaskan children's reading interests.

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## READING RESEARCH: CAN IT IMPROVE COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION?

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Vygotsky (1978) asserts that a child's learning is shaped by social processes. According to this view, learning occurs through the social interaction of an expert (adult, teacher) and a novice (child). In the social milieu of the classroom, this interaction takes the form of the teacher (expert) explaining and modeling the thought processes (what, why, how, when, where) necessary for skill acquisition. Feuerstein (1979) also argues that cognitive growth is enhanced when an adult (the proficient learner) establishes an instructional environment that fosters learning.

A second factor that appears to affect learning is the idea of "putting students in charge" of their own learning. Smith (1982) contends that teachers seem unwilling to share planning, monitoring, and evaluating roles with their students. Consequently, when instruction ceases, so does the use of the trained skill (Belmont and Butterfield, 1977; Paris and Cross, 1983). To ensure durability of learning, instruction should progress from teacher-controlled to student-controlled (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). In other words, instruction begins with the teacher explaining the skill, to the teacher monitoring the students' use of the skill, to the teacher only providing assistance when necessary. This instructional sequence should foster enhanced learning performance.

Do these theories of learning play a role in current reading comprehension instruction? Durkin (1978-79; 1981) suggests that the general focus of comprehension instruction given by teachers and scripted in basal-reader manuals, can be characterized by the following scenario: a skill is mentioned, workbook pages and/or dittoes are assigned, and students' performance is assessed. According to this scenario, students are told the "what" (e.g., today we are

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going to learn about main ideas), but rarely are they told the "why," "how," "where" and "when" (Roehler and Duffy, 1984). This mentioning and assigning approach to comprehension instruction seems to assume that if students practice a skill often enough, insightful learning will occur. Lack of direct explanation (e.g., what, why, how) by the teacher may impede skill learning and transfer because students must infer on their own the causal relationship between skill use and improved comprehension.

Are teachers willing to relinquish responsibility for learning to their students? Research findings are mixed (Garner, in press; Palincsar and Brown, 1982). Belmont and Butterfield (1977) claim that children "frequently revert to their immature strategies when no longer explicitly constrained to play the instructor's programs" (p. 465). If the goal of instruction is to have students engage in deliberate, planful, conscious learning, then students must ultimately assume responsibility for their own learning.

The purpose of this article is to review the research supporting these two instructional models, and to suggest implications for classroom reading instruction.

### **Teacher Explanation vs. Teacher Mentioning**

Paris and his colleagues (Paris, Lipson and Wixson, 1983; Paris, Oka and DeBritto, 1983) assert that any type of instruction should provide students with three kinds of knowledge; (a) declarative--knowing that a skill works; (b) procedural--knowing how to perform the skill; and (c) conditional--knowing when and why a skill should be used to accomplish different purposes (Paris, Lipson and Wixson, 1983, pp. 303-304). Paris contends that of the three, conditional knowledge is the most important because it provides the metacognitive insight necessary for skill transfer. Therefore, conditional knowledge should help students to become less bureaucratic (skill is used in only one learning context) and more democratic (a skill is used in many learning contexts) in their learning. These three knowledge categories have served as a framework for current content analysis and instructional research on direct explanation for skill learning provided by teachers and basal reading manuals.

Since commercial materials exert a powerful influence

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upon classroom reading instruction (Shannon, 1983), researchers are analyzing the instructional directives supplied in these materials for instances of direct explanation (e.g., when, why, etc.). Based on the direct explanation model, Johnston and Byrd (1983) discuss five components that should be present in any skill instruction, if the instruction is to foster comprehension. The five components are (a) structure, (b) goal-directedness, (c) a focus on the causal relationship between skill use and improved comprehension, (d) an emphasis on the learners' control of the strategy, and (e) self-monitoring of performance (p. 142). Johnston and Byrd contend that if these five components are present in instruction, students should better (a) understand the process of acquiring a skill - the "how," (b) realize that the skill enhances comprehension - the "why" and the "when," (c) assume responsibility for their own comprehension - the "where," and (d) realize when their comprehension begins to break down. They analyzed two current basal-reading programs (grades three and five) for instances of these five components. From their analysis they concluded that these instructional components were not evident in the materials they surveyed.

Hare and Milligan (1984) focused their content analysis on one specific comprehension skill. They analyzed four well-known basal reading series (grades one through six) for their direct explanation concerning main-idea instruction. Their analysis revealed that all of the series lacked specific directives for identifying the main idea. In particular, the issue of how to determine important text information seemed to be avoided (cf. Winograd, 1984). If the materials teachers use are not providing direct explanation, can teachers be trained to use this instructional strategy? If so, what effect does this strategy have on the learning process? Several researchers (Raphael, 1984; Roehler and Duffy, 1984; Roehler, Duffy and Meloth, 1984) are investigating these questions.

Roehler and Duffy (1984) state that direct explanation makes explicit (a) the mental processing required for skill learning, (b) the purpose for learning and using the skill, and (c) the strategy that enhances the delivery of skill instruction. According to Roehler and Duffy, the key to direct explanation is the teacher modeling the thinking

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needed to perform the skill. Their direct explanation model also suggests a need to restructure the typical basal-reading lesson sequence. Skills are taught and practiced prior to the reading of a basal story, applied during the actual reading of the story, and then used in other various reading situations. This instructional sequence highlights for the students the utility of their skill learning.

Roehler and her colleagues (Roehler & Duffy, 1984; Roehler, Duffy & Meloth, 1984) investigated these assumptions by training elementary teachers to use direct explanation as the basis for their skill instruction. Teacher's ability to use this strategy was documented using audiotapes, field notes, and student interviews. The effect of direct explanation on students' ability to understand and use the instructed skill was assessed by asking a sample of low-ability readers these three questions: (a) what were your learning to do today? (b) how do you do that? and (c) why is it important? Results of their observations and interviews suggest that direct explanation fosters a greater student awareness for skill learning and nudges the teacher to model and practice the skill before the students apply it to the basal story.

In contrast to Roehler et al's research, Raphael (1984) investigated what effect direct explanation would have on a specific comprehension strategy. Fourth-grade teachers were trained how to explain/teach three types of question-answer relationships: (a) Right there - question and answer come from the same sentence in a text; (b) Think and Search - one sentence is used to construct the question but the answer is located in a different sentence or section of the text; and (c) On My Own - the text is used to develop the question, but the answer comes from the reader's own knowledge base. Teaching sessions were videotaped and students' question-answering performance on two posttests was analyzed. Although direct explanation did not enhance cognitive performance (correct answers to questions), it did enhance meta-cognitive performance (knowledge of where the answers could be found). Raphael speculated that direct explanation did not affect cognitive performance because of the intense quantity of question-answering drill and practice given during the training sessions. However, she did find evidence to suggest a correlation between the quality of a teacher's

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direct explanation and a student's ability to discriminate among various information sources.

Review of other research studies (see Pearson & Gallagher, 1984) further support the educational benefits of direct explanation. It seems that this instructional strategy not only affects basic research but also holds promise for improving comprehension instruction and student achievement.

### **Student Control Versus Teacher Control**

Implied in direct explanation is the idea of socialized, mediated learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). This idea suggests that learning first occurs through some type of social interaction before it becomes internalized or student-controlled. For example, during initial skill instruction, the teacher models, explains, supplies information, questions and corrects. This part of instruction is mainly teacher-controlled with provision for teacher-student interaction. Once students understand the mental processing for a skill, instructional assistance should be withdrawn to ensure ownership of the newly learned skill. Students (with minimal teacher prompting) now become responsible for applying the skill in a variety of learning contexts. At this point, students now engage in deliberate, planful, conscious activity to ensure efficient, independent learning. The questions that need to be answered are these: are teachers willing to release responsibility for learning, and if so, what effect does this have on student achievement?

Garner (in press) supplied eight teachers who were tutoring in a university's summer reading clinic with three instructional scripts. These scripts progressed from total teacher control to total student control of the learning. The third script did allow for teacher assistance in that they could provide students with feedback (e.g., I knew you could find the answer) and general strategy comments (e.g., what do you think you should do next?). Analysis of the audiotapes of the teachers' lessons showed that only three of the eight teachers were able to release responsibility for learning to their students. Garner speculated that this reluctance to release instructional control may keep students instructionally dependent, thereby hindering efficient learning.

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Palincsar and Brown (1983) using a reciprocal teaching technique, taught remedial junior-high students strategies for improving their comprehension of text. All of the strategies were extensively modeled by the researchers before the students assumed the role of the teacher. The four strategies were: (a) summarize each paragraph in one sentence, (b) clarify any unclear information, (c) ask questions a teacher might ask about each paragraph, and (d) predict what the next paragraph will be about. When the students assumed the role of the teacher, the researchers always provided feedback concerning the quality of the students' use of the strategies. At the conclusion of each teaching session, the students independently read an expository passage and answered ten comprehension questions. These assessments were used to track students' improvement from the strategy training. To determine if this training transferred to the actual classroom situation, students also read passages from their social studies texts (during their social studies class) and responded to questions. Data obtained from this study demonstrated improved comprehension performance not only in the researcher-led training sessions (students progressed from 40% to 80% accuracy in answering questions) but also to some extent in the actual classroom setting. This study illustrates the benefits of teacher modeling and the release of responsibility for learning.

The true test for any theory is its applicability to the actual classroom situation. As part of a research project (Graves and Hansen, 1983; Hansen, 1984), Hansen observed a first grade classroom where the students were responsible for learning the processes required for beginning reading and writing. At the start of the school year, students were put in charge of their own learning. In this self-learning environment, a variety of people (peers, parents) supported these first graders' learning endeavors. Since teacher talk was minimal in this classroom, children relied on each other for answers to their questions about the reading/writing process. The teacher always attended closely to classroom discussions in order to structure necessary instruction. This first grade classroom epitomized independent student learning.

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### Restructuring Instruction

The previous research holds promise for enhancing classroom skill instruction. Direct explanation focuses instruction on the process necessary for acquiring a skill as well as highlighting its relevancy and wide applicability. Using a think aloud procedure, the teacher would explain how s/he acquires a skill and then models how it is applied to various learning contexts. Following this explanation and modeling, the students would practice the skill and receive corrective feedback to better ensure control of the learned skill. When students have mastered the skill, the teacher would only remind them to use it when appropriate. This instructional sequence gradually transfers responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students.

Suppose the skill to be taught is "following the sequence" of an expository text. Using the "direct explanation" model, the following instructional script would be generated:

Today we are going to learn that sometimes information that we read in our science, social studies, and health textbooks is written in a certain order. This ordering of information is called a text's sequence. (what) It is important to follow a text's sequence because it helps the reader better understand and organize what is read (why). How does a person know if information in a text follows a certain sequence? Suppose I am reading how to perform an experiment in my science textbook. As I am reading, I notice words like first, second, third, next, last, etc. These words signal that this information is following a specific sequence. Therefore, if I am supposed to perform the experiment, I know I should follow the steps in their proper sequence. If I don't, the experiment will fail. Suppose I am reading in my social studies textbook, "how a bill becomes a law." If I notice the signal words, first, second, etc., I again know this information is following a specific sequence. Therefore, as I read, I try to remember this procedure in its proper sequence. Rehearsing or saying the information to myself, helps me remember this sequence. By doing this, I am better able to discuss this information in class or on a test (how). Whenever I read in school,

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at home, or study for a test, I follow text and remember a text's sequence (when and where).

Following this explanation, the teacher would model how s/he follows and rehearses information according to the text's stated sequence. Finally, the students would practice this skill using a variety of texts. Teacher control of their learning would gradually be relinquished.

One drawback to this instructional approach is that the teacher has the responsibility for developing the instructional script since process explanation is often sparse in commercial learning materials (Durkin, 1981; Hare and Milligan, 1984). Possible benefits for this expenditure of time could be more informed learning and independent use of the trained skill. A rationale for considering this approach is that it could provide a first step in resolving the "mentioning" versus the "actual teaching" dilemma. Only the classroom teacher can prove or disprove this instructional assumption!

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## HELPING YOUNG READERS: A TEACHER'S TALK FOR PARENTS

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Reading teachers are often asked to speak to groups of parents about ways parents can help their children to be better readers. Lists of tips for parents are likely to be useful and well received, but talks which also try to give parents insight into a current theory or view of reading might be even more useful. If parents have some understanding of the process of reading, not only will lists of suggestions make more sense to them, but they should be able to use such an understanding to generate their own ideas and to modify old suggestions when they unexpectedly fail.

The present article outlines an entertaining one-hour parent talk designed to communicate a current perspective on reading (Goodman, 1967; Rumelhart, 1977) and makes suggestions for helping young readers at home.

### The Overview

During the overview, the parents are told that first we're going to talk a little about what a person does when reading, i.e., about the process of reading, or how it happens. Second, after we talk about how we read, we'll go over some specific suggestions for ways to help our children be better readers.

### Demonstration and Presentation of a Simplified Version of a Current View of the Reading Process

### Five Features of Reading

The parents are told that to help us understand a current view of how people read, I'll ask them to read

something. They're told that a phrase will be flashed (on an overhead projector or a large card), and they should read it and tell what they saw. You might want to flash a following page of this article where Figure 1 shows the phrase, to see if you read what most parents read.

Although the phrase says "Paris in the the spring," nearly all parents see it as "Paris in the spring." When asked why we read it as "Paris in the Spring," parents give reasons such as : It's a familiar phrase. You don't expect to see two "the's" together. You just see Paris and spring, so you think it's "Paris in the spring."

What is the point of the demonstration? That reading is not simply a sequential process of looking at every letter and putting letters together to make words, and words together to make phrases, etc. Instead, it can be characterized as a sampling process wherein we make guesses about meaning. Drastically simplified, reading involves the following five features: background knowledge, expectations, sampling and guessing, comparing, and matching.

Background Knowledge. We start with some knowledge of the topic and of how language works. In our "Paris in the the spring" example, many of us had prior knowledge of the familiar phrase. Similarly, our background knowledge of grammatical conventions of English dictated that it's very unusual to read two "the's" together in a sentence.

Expectations. We use our background knowledge to set up expectations for content and for specific words. Expectations play a very important role in reading. We often read or see what we expect to be there. We interpret experience in the light of our expectations.

Expectations lead us. In The Phantom Tollbooth (Juster, 1961), a book written for adolescents, the character Milo goes on a long journey. As he arrives at a tollbooth, he sees a sign "Welcome to Expectations." He asks, "What is the place--Expectations?" The attendant says "Expectations is the place you must always go to before you get to where you're going."

In reading as in life, one's interpretations are greatly influenced by what we expect to find.

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Sampling and guessing. Readers sample and make guesses as they read rather than looking at every letter and word. In order to make guesses, readers must be willing to take chances and risk being wrong. For poorer readers, guessing and taking risks can be very difficult.

A demonstration of guessing and risk taking--During the early 50s, a theory called Signal Detection Theory (Swets, 1973) emerged because military personnel discovered use of radar to detect targets or signals was imperfect and many signals or targets were missed. Sometimes presence of a target or signal was very clear, and sometimes it was very clear that no target or signal was there, but often it was difficult to tell either way. Decision makers, it turned out, were conservative. They were reluctant to guess the target was there when the target was unclear.

Assuming the radar equipment could not be improved, psychologists turned to a graphic display like the one in Figure 2 and reasoned that if the decision maker's task was mainly to increase success, then the incidences in box one must increase. To do that, the decision makers would have to guess the target was present more often. However, because of imperfect reliability of radar, if they guessed the target was present, they could be wrong. Incidences in box 2, failure, would also increase. Thus, they would have to learn to guess the targets present more often, but the trade-off would be increased numbers of failures.

Figure 1. An illustration of the use of background knowledge, expectations, and guessing in reading.

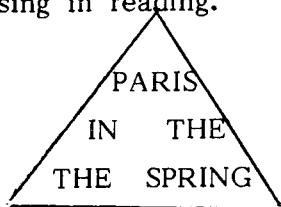


Figure 2. A schematic of the intersections of decision choices (guesses) and reality.

		There	Not There
Not There	There	Success 1	Failure 2
	Not There	Failure 3	Success 4

Another example of the relationship between success and failure in risk taking comes from baseball. A few years ago, Rickey Henderson broke the record for the most stolen bases. Note--he also had the record for the most failed attempts.

The relevant point of Signal Detection Theory is that guessing involves some risk of being wrong. Yet in order to be more successful, more guesses will need to be made, and some failure is likely to be encountered.

Comparing. Readers should compare what they sample to what they expected to find.

Matching. If there is a match between what was read and what was expected, reading continues. If not, there are several recourses, e.g., a reader might quit, reread, read ahead, or ask for help.

### Reading is Creative

Next the parents are told we'll go just a little farther now with this view of reading to make one more point. We read a brief passage, and ask some questions. The passage: John went to Vescio's, his favorite Italian restaurant. When the waiter brought his food, John was so enraged that he left without leaving a tip. He even forgot his umbrella. (Passage from Pearson & Johnson, 1978)

A question such as "Where did John go (at the beginning)?" is answered by "to Vescio's" or "to an Italian restaurant." The parents are then asked where the answer came from--from the words on the page.

Another question, "What's the restaurant like?" elicits the most interesting responses. Consider three types of Italian restaurants. One is a fast food place. Let's call it "Minute Macaroni." At the other extreme is "Sanatore's" an "uptown" and sophisticated restaurant, where at least four courses are always served, there is a maitre d'hui, there are white tablecloths with accompanying elegant table settings, and there is a waiter whose only job is to stand at the side of the room and watch for smokers so he can light their cigarettes. A third type of restaurant, which we'll call "Sal's," might fall someplace in between the first two. Sal's is a place where there may or may not be someone to seat you, there probably are vinyl red

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and white checked tablecloths, there are candleholders with plastic white webbing on them (the kind you use outdoors to keep bugs away) or old Chianti bottles with candle stubs in them, and a basic one-course menu. Which of these three types of restaurants is Vescio's? If you said "Sal's," you picked the one most parents pick.

Why do people paint Vescio's in their minds most like Sal's? Typical responses are: "Because I know that it's unusual for single people to go alone to a very fancy place." "At a fast food restaurant you pay before you sit down." "At a really special place you probably would not order lasagna." Isn't it interesting that we have a fairly detailed picture of what Vescio's looks like? But notice that such a picture is not directly described any place in the written words!

The point of this exercise is that readers do gain insight into meaning directly from the words on the page, but they also use prior knowledge, feelings, and beliefs to interpret texts and to build and enrich interpretation and understanding. So reading is a powerfully creative process. Meaning is created through the interface of words on the page and what's already in the reader's mind.

### Implications for Parenting Reading

Finally, some of the implications of the view of reading presented here are shared, and accompanying specific suggestions for how parents can encourage their youngsters to be better readers are given. These are:

- 1.) Background knowledge plays an important role in reading. Parents can help their children by engaging them in real life and vicarious experiences such as going on trips, sharing movies, watching selected television programs, and reading books, newspapers, and magazines.
  - 2.) Knowledge of how language works affects readers' expectations and guesses before and during reading. Parents can help by modeling good communication, genuinely listening to and talking with their children, paraphrasing, and correctly repeating inappropriate or ungrammatical statements.
  - 3.) Expectations affect interpretation and understanding
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of text and other experiences. Parents can help children to learn to set up expectations to guide and facilitate their comprehension while reading. One way to do this is to ask questions that require children to make predictions about what they expect to find, see, or hear in a movie, program, or book they are about to see or hear, or a trip they are about to take.

4.) Guessing is an integral part of reading. Suggestions for parents to help children make guesses and take risks include talking to their children about the importance of making "educated" guesses about words or ideas while reading, encouraging them to guess at words based on surrounding meaning or prior knowledge, and de-emphasizing word-perfect reading. Also, parents can provide support and encouragement when guesses are off-track and be willing to give partial credit for choices and responses that are only partly right. Asking for opinions and showing that texts can have several interpretations also enhances guesses and risk-taking.

5.) Effort and trying to "fix up" are useful when miscomprehension or mismatches occur. Poorer readers especially are often unaware that effort--trying to do something, helps when there's a problem. Parents can suggest that children use intervention strategies such as reading ahead, rereading, and thinking about what makes sense.

### Conclusion

Parents are often very concerned about how they can help their children to read better. They can be eager for insight and suggestions. This article attempted to give a detailed outline of a light but informative and theory-based way to help parents help their children.

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## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPROVING BASAL SKILL INSTRUCTION

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For many years, basal teachers' manuals have been used as the primary resource for providing reading skill instruction. Recently, researchers have found that basal teachers' manuals provide little structure and rationale for helping teachers give effective skill instruction. In fact, teachers themselves rate skill lesson directives in teachers' manuals as only moderately helpful (Bacharach & Alexander, 1986).

In 1981, Durkin found that comprehension skill lessons in teachers' manuals were more evaluative in nature than instructional. Because basal skill lessons provide little help for teaching effective skill lessons, teachers often resort to a practice Durkin (1981) labeled "mentioning and assigning." Mentioning is saying just enough about a skill or concept to assign a worksheet. In fact, recent reports indicate that skill instruction in many classrooms generally consists of teachers assigning and monitoring students' completion of commercially developed worksheets (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985). This article suggests three changes emerging from recent theory and research to help teachers improve the effectiveness of their lessons.

#1: Skill instruction should occur prior to reading rather than after the fact.

Although the story or text is the presumed context for applying skill instruction, the typical basal sequence has skill instruction following the story (Reutzel, 1985). Duffy and Roehler (1984) confirmed this fact when they remarked, "When comprehension is dealt with, it is after the fact; teachers frequently teach comprehension skills after students have read, and perhaps misunderstood, a story. They do this partly because it's recommended in most basal textbooks (page 1)."

We recommend that teachers teach basal skill lessons prior to reading the stories or text regardless of the placement of basal skill lesson instructional directives in the teacher's manual. By teaching skills prior to reading, students gain necessary reading skills in preparation for reading rather than learning reading skills after reading only to be applied to worksheets. Aside from theory and research, common sense dictates that if reading skills are learned to help one successfully read a text, then reading skill instruction should precede the text reading.

## #2: Explicitly Relate Basal Skill Instruction to the Stories or Text.

In 1983, Mason found that 76% of teachers' instructional time was spent on instruction unrelated to the stories or texts children would be asked to read. Beck (1981) found that phonics instruction was poorly related to the stories children were assigned to read in their primers. Reutzel & Daines (in press) traced Mason's (1983) findings of the unrelatedness of reading instruction to basal teachers' manuals. They found that the instructional directives in seven basal series teachers' manuals were related to the stories or text less than 33% of the time. As a result, Reutzel and Daines strongly suggest that reading skill instruction be explicitly related to 1) the stories or texts the children will be expected to read, or 2) to functional, real-life reading situations in which the skill can be applied.

Since most basal teachers' editions fail to connect skill instruction to the stories or to real life situations, teachers will need to examine and adjust skill instruction to make explicit the relation between learning a reading skill and its application in reading a text. As it now stands, children may fail to recognize the connection between instruction in reading skills and strategies and the act of reading.

## #3: Use Direct Instruction Techniques to Improve Basal Skill Instruction.

Another modification to traditional skill instruction we propose is rooted in the teacher effectiveness literature. Researchers such as Anderson, Evertson, and Brophy, 1979; Good, 1979; Rupley and Blair, 1978; and Stevens and Rosenshine, 1981 have established a strong connection

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between student achievement and the use of direct instruction procedures. Direct instruction implies that the teacher is central to and actively involved in the teaching act.

Durkin (1978) defined comprehension instruction as the teacher engaging in modeling, demonstrating, explaining, and defining how to comprehend a text. Pearson (1985) indicated that teachers of reading in the '80s should assume the role of "sharers of secrets, conspirators, coaches, and cheerleaders" (p. 736), and provide students guided practice and substantive feedback.

To provide the direct, explicit skill instruction as suggested above, we find Hunter's Model (1984) to be an effective framework. This model consists of seven parts: 1) Anticipatory set, 2) Objective, 3) Instructional Input, 4) Modeling, 5) Checking for Understanding, 6) Guided Practice, and 7) Independent Practice. The elements of vocabulary development and background preceding the introduction of a new skill are captured under the heading of Anticipatory Set. We use Hunter's term Objective to represent the goal or purpose for learning the reading skill. Input focuses on necessary explanation of the reading skill. Next, the use of the skill to be taught is modeled in text or in a real world situation (Modeling). After modeling, students participate in a group experience where they apply the skill under the guidance of the teacher. This experience is called Guided Practice. Before, during and after guided practice, we check for understanding by observing student behavior and by asking questions. After guided practice, students are given an opportunity to apply the skill independently to the story in their reader and/or to a simulated real life event.

Finally, to Hunter's (1984) seven components of instruction, we add an eighth--Assessment. The effect of instruction if evaluated by the use of a criterion referenced test and/or teacher observations. The steps involved in using the Hunter Model (1984), including our modification, to provide direct, explicit basal skill instruction are summarized in Figure 1, on the following page.

To help teachers visualize the use of the three suggested changes to improve basal skill instruction, we present an example lesson on the comprehension skill of "getting the sequence." We chose this skill because many teachers find this skill to be particularly difficult to visualize teaching

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Figure 1  
THE DIRECT INSTRUCTION SKILL PLAN FOR  
FOR TEACHING READING SKILL LESSONS

ANTICIPATORY SET

Relate the reading skill to be taught to the children's experiential backgrounds.

OBJECTIVE AND INPUT

Inform students about which reading skill they will be learning. Give students a purpose for learning the reading skill.

MODELING

Demonstrate how one learns and applies the reading skill.

PURPOSE SETTING AND GUIDED APPLICATION

Prepare the students to apply the reading skill  
in reading the basal story, or  
in a real life situation.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students apply the reading skill in reading the basal

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Understanding the reading skill is checked throughout  
the lesson

REAL-LIFE APPLICATION

ASSESSMENT

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prior to reading the story or text.

APPLYING THE SUGGESTED CHANGES IN INSTRUCTION

At the outset, we are careful to provide our basal skill instruction before the students read the story or text to be assigned. This is important to help students bridge the gap between instruction of the skill and application of the skill in reading. The lesson on "getting the sequence" begins with providing the anticipatory set.

Anticipatory Set

We begin by discussing several real world situations

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when "getting the sequence" is of critical importance, such as using recipes, working math problems, assembling a bike, etc. Children are asked if they can recall a time when they failed to follow the correct order and the consequences that resulted. This is done to make critical ties between the skill taught and the individual backgrounds of the children.

### Objective and Input

Next, the students are informed that the objective for the lesson is "getting the sequence." Getting the sequence is defined as the ability to reorder the events that occur in a story or in life.

The lesson input begins with a piece of text shown on an overhead projector to the entire group of children. Texts in which magic tricks are described serve well as an initial experience for demonstrating sequence of events. For example, we show children the water glass trick by filling a glass of water, putting a heavy piece of paper over the glass, turning it over and observing that the water remains in the glass without touching the paper. After this demonstration, a discussion of the written directions for the water glass trick ensues. Emphasis is placed upon locating sequence signal words. We point out to the children that there are words (vocabulary) in our language which often signal sequence, i.e., before, after, next, first, second, then, etc. Then, we sequence the directions on a timeline. To test the correctness of the sequence, several children can be invited to come forward and by following the sequence of our directions, perform the trick. This helps students immediately monitor their construction of the sequence of events leading up to the successful completion of the water glass trick.

### Modeling

The role of the teacher during this stage of the lesson is to "model" the desired reading and thinking behaviors pertaining to the skill lesson. This usually means a "thinking aloud" process is used whereby we discuss aloud and demonstrate the application of our mental strategies to determine the sequence for the children. It is crucial to the success of the lesson for teachers to select an example for modeling that closely parallels the story to be read by the students

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during subsequent stages of the reading lesson.

Another text is placed onto the overhead projector dealing with hot air ballooning. We read the passage aloud to the class, and list the important elements of the text related to hot air ballooning at the board. As we order and reorder these elements, we "think aloud" for the class so that the students are allowed to witness the logical processes and verification strategies we use to successfully complete the task.

Once the modeling process is completed, the steps for getting the sequence are recorded at the chalkboard. Students ask questions afterwards and will frequently offer alternatives in logic that bring others to the same conclusions. When we are reasonably certain that the students have grasped the essential elements of the skill, the lesson proceeds.

### Guided Practice

The purpose of guided practice in our minds is to supervise the application of the skill and verify whether or not the children have understood the skill or concept being taught. Another reading selection is chosen that closely parallels those previously used, this time, a selection is presented on how to assemble a bicycle. To begin, we conduct a discussion about unfamiliar vocabulary and background information in preparation for reading the passage. After previewing the title of the story, surveying pictures and reading any subheadings, we ask the students to close their books and predict the necessary sequence for a success in constructing a bicycle based upon their limited knowledge of the story. Next, the children make advance predictions, then read the story silently. If the predictions are incorrect the children are instructed to revise them on their own to match the passage information. When students feel they have successfully noted the correct sequence, the summary is presented to the teacher for final evaluation.

### Checking for Understanding

A pervasive element in direct instruction is checking for understanding. We continually assess student understanding throughout the instructional sequence and are prepared for reteaching activities as necessary. The most crucial

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checkpoints seem to be after modeling, after guided practice, and after independent practice.

### Purpose Setting and Independent Practice

The purpose of independent practice, we believe, is to verify whether or not the children have understood the skill or concept being taught and can apply it to their reading without requiring additional teacher assistance. It is also at this point in the lesson we make explicit the relation between the skill instructed and its application to reading the story or text. To accomplish this, we introduce the children to the story in their basal reader. In our basal lesson the story pertains to sky diving. To begin, we conduct a discussion about unfamiliar vocabulary and background information in preparation for reading the story. After previewing the title of the story, surveying pictures and reading any subheadings, we ask the students to close their books and predict the necessary sequence for a successful sky diving experience based upon their limited knowledge of the story. To increase the motivation and focus for the selection we remind the class that failure to "get the sequence" in this situation cause a prospective sky diver to suffer a very negative consequence.

As the children begin to venture their best guesses, we put the individual events onto large cards and hang them on a clothesline timeline. Next, we arrange the cards to reflect the group's predictions with respect to the story's sequence. Children are instructed to write down their own predicted sequence of events in the story if their sequence differs from the class prediction.

Now the children are ready to read the story to check their predictions. After the selection has been read, the children will be asked to review the sequence, revise the order as necessary, and add any missing elements not anticipated before the story had been read.

There is an important distinction between guided and independent practice that deserves some attention. When students engage in guided practice activities, they have the privilege of asking the teacher for assistance should they have difficulty completing the assignment. Formative evaluation and reteaching are necessary and integral components in guided practice. In contrast, during independent

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practice the teacher does not intervene until the assignment has been completed by the student(s).

### Real-Life Application

As a culminating activity, we involve our students in art, cooking, construction, or extended language projects. We brought an unassembled bicycle to school with the instructions and tools necessary to assemble it. We read books to the children about how bicycles were invented, and we have a wide variety of trade books available for them to read on cycling. Projects such as these help children realize that reading skills have application in the larger world context of life. These activities emphasize the social utility of reading skills and help them value the new reading skill acquired.

### Assessment

To evaluate the effect of our instruction, a criterion test from other selected texts or passages can be designed to assess the reading skill of getting the sequence. Informal observations of the students' performance during the real-life application projects can also be used to assess student learning.

## SUMMARY

The suggestions advanced provide comprehensive changes for providing purposeful, direct, and text-related reading skill instruction. The changes offer greater direction and rationale for teaching the various reading skills included in the typical reading curriculum. Moreover, the changes place skill instruction prior to the reading of the text in the reading lesson sequence to facilitate application of skills to the act of reading. Finally, the suggested changes encourage teachers to explicitly relate their instruction to the text or story the children will be asked to read. This is done to make critical connections between the teaching of reading skills and the application of reading skills during reading. Teachers who have used these suggestions for improving instruction have found their students to be the delighted beneficiaries of thoughtful, coherent basal reading skill instruction.

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## WHAT'S THE VALUE OF AN IRI? IS IT BEING USED?

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While the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) has long been recommended as a valuable instrument for initial placement of students in reading materials and for diagnosis of students' strengths and weaknesses in comprehension and word recognition skills (Beldin, 1970), the feasibility of its use by classroom teachers has been questioned because of the time involved. Della-Piana, Jensen, and Murdock (1970) stated that the time factor in the construction, administration and interpretation of IRIs precluded their frequent use by classroom teachers. However, no data were provided to substantiate their opinion. From a survey among 24 professionals (reading specialists, classroom teachers, media specialists, and one administrator), Johns (1976) reported that the group was evenly split on the usability of the IRI by classroom teachers. "A number of respondents indicated that the use of IRIs by elementary teachers was a problem because of the time involved" (Johns, 1976, p. 12). In contrast, the respondents perceived no problems in the use of the IRI by reading and learning disability specialists in a clinical situation.

Recently, Masztal and Smith (1984) provided some empirical data on the use of IRIs by classroom teachers. While 78% of their 125 respondents indicated that they knew how to administer the IRI, only 54% reported that they actually administered IRIs in their classrooms. Masztal and Smith concluded that, because the IRI was used by over half the teachers in their sample, teacher educators were justified in spending large amounts of time necessary to instruct preservice teachers in the administration and interpretation of an IRI. However, their questionnaire did not address the frequency of IRI use.

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