

## Reading

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### Strategies for Reading Independence

"He knows the skills. He just doesn't apply them." This observation demonstrates teachers' awareness that having the skill and using it at the right time and place are not synonymous. Developing reading independence is no different from developing independence in other skills. Consider the stages children go through in acquiring mature, independent toothbrushing skills.

Each day, at the appropriate times, we take the child to the appropriate place and give toothbrushing instruction. We show her what to do, let her try, give her advice and encouragement. As the days of toothbrushing training go on, we fade out some of our modeling and leave more and more for the child to do. We also add some niceties such as rinsing the toothbrush and putting the cap back on the toothpaste tube. Eventually, the child can, when told, accompany us to the bathroom and carry out all the actions.

The road to independent toothbrushing does not end when the child can do all these things when told. Several more months or years of direction may be required before the adult-like behaviors of going and brushing and rinsing the brush and replacing the cap occur automatically, at the right times, and independently!

During this stage, we are not teaching the child the skills of toothbrushing. Rather, we are trying to move control of that toothbrushing from ourselves to the child. We no longer accompany the child to brush, but we tell her to do it and inspect afterwards—both the teeth and the bathroom. Sometimes, return trips and fix-up strategies are required.

This common experience with toothbrushing training can be applied to everything we want children to do to become independent readers. Knowing how to do something is a skill. Knowing when to do it, doing it well, checking to see that you have done it well, and doing it automatically mean achieving independence with that skill.

Developing independence in reading skills has recently been the subject of much research. Most of this research can be found under the heading of "metacognition." Brown (1980) describes some of the metacognitive skills involved in reading as: (1) clarifying the purpose for reading; (2) identifying the important ideas and separating the major content from the trivial; (3) monitoring and self-questioning to determine when comprehension is occurring and purposes are being met; and (4) taking corrective action when failures in comprehension are detected. As might be expected, older readers are better than

younger readers at monitoring their comprehension and applying appropriate "fix-up" strategies. Good readers demonstrate these strategies much more frequently than poor readers (Baker and Brown 1984).

Much research has focused on improving the metacognitive abilities of readers. In these studies, students are taught the skills needed, but skill instruction is only the beginning. Students are also taught how the strategies will be useful to them, when the strategies are appropriate, and how to evaluate if they are employing the strategies effectively. Reviews of this instructional research (Baker and Brown 1984, Wagoner 1983) suggest that students at various grade levels can be taught to apply various metacognitive strategies, and that applying these strategies significantly affects their comprehension.

We teach students many different skills and assume that they are mastered when students can perform them when asked. Like toothbrushing, skills must not only be taught until children can do them but until they do them automatically, whenever they are needed. □

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