

A Cognitive and Motivational Agenda for Reading Instruction

Teachers can help their students become enthusiastic, independent readers by fostering their use of cognitive strategies and by helping them understand the benefits of reading.

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During the past 30 years, American teachers have had progressively less time and fewer opportunities for the creative teaching of reading. As a result, too many of our children do not develop into thoughtful readers and independent learners. We examine here some of the roadblocks to developing thoughtful readers and some innovations in research that can help teachers provide better reading instruction.

Constraints on Reading Instruction

Three historical influences affect our current practices in reading instruction.

Basal readers. First, there has been an overwhelming reliance on basal reading series for instruction in grades K-8 (Paris et al. 1986). Basal reading programs were designed to provide systematic, uniform instruction. Unfortunately, they have also produced "management mentality" in both students and teachers—a mechanical rather than a thoughtful orientation to reading. When reading is extracted from the curriculum and taught as a separate subject, teachers may overemphasize the skills content of basal readers and fail to link these skills in meaningful ways to literature or other academic areas. Consequently, students may be unmotivated to read stories in the basal materials or to learn vital information.

Research by Durkin (1978-79 and 1981) and others (Hare and Milligan 1984) revealed that (a) traditional basal reading lessons included little comprehension instruction, and (b) the teachers' editions seldom included information about the cognitive strategies students were supposed to master. Indeed, some researchers argue that basal reading series often involve so much time, management, and dependence that they "deskill" teachers and disallow creative instruction (Shannon 1983, Woodward 1986).

Assessment. A second constraint on the teaching of reading is the method of assessment. In most classrooms, testing clearly drives the reading curriculum. American schoolchildren endure repeated testing that includes end-of-unit basal tests, standardized

achievement tests, and a variety of criterion- and norm-referenced assessments mandated by district and state policies. These assessments, however well-intentioned, have unfortunate consequences (Winograd and Greenlee 1986). For example, in many cities the test results of individual schools or even classrooms are published so that the public can evaluate the effectiveness of a school or teacher. Yet, many standardized tests are highly correlated with students' IQ scores and academic histories, rather than with the quality and effectiveness of reading instruction in a particular classroom (Cross and Paris 1987). Too often, testing does not measure instruction or prescribe appropriate remediation for students who have difficulty reading (Johnston 1984).

Part of the problem may be outdated notions of reading that underlie these assessments. Children's comprehension is typically measured by the ability to answer multiple-choice questions after reading a variety of short paragraphs. Such tests, however, do not take into consideration children's familiarity with the topics, the strategies that may be appropriate to understanding the passages, or individual variations in motivation to read them. Results are further confounded by variations in test-taking skills, reading speed, and anxiety level.

To remedy these shortcomings, many researchers have recommended

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developing new methods of assessment based on current conceptions of reading (Johnston 1984, Wixson and Peters 1987). New reading tests under development in the states of Michigan and Illinois, for example, include assessments of students' metacognition, cognitive strategies, background knowledge, and motivation. The designers of these tests reason that if testing drives the curriculum, then one way to improve reading instruction is to improve the nature of reading assessment.

Competition. A third constraint on reading instruction is the emphasis on academic competition in the classroom. Traditional reading instruction often fosters competition among students. The use of ability groups in reading, for instance, can lead to preferential treatment: more challenging instruction for good readers along with social stigmatization for poor readers (Allington 1983). Moreover, the inflexible use of ability groups teaches children that success in reading is measured not by information gained or pleasure experienced, but rather by group membership. This lesson is reinforced by the repeated tests administered in classrooms. Good readers get high scores and good grades; poor readers get low scores and poor grades. As a result, many children come to regard reading as an arena for competition rather than a form of communication.

One unfortunate consequence of competition is that many students develop a passive approach to learning and become detached from the goals of reading. These children learn to believe that failure is inevitable in the competitive environment. As a result, they prefer to be passive and apathetic and to fail rather than to confirm attributions of low ability by trying hard and then failing. Johnston and Winograd (1985) call this coping tactic "passive failure."

Clearly, these major forces driving reading instruction today—basal reading series, repeated assessments, and a competitive learning environment—should be reexamined. We need to rethink our goals for reading instruction so we can provide innovative methods that promote the develop-

ment of positive attitudes and effective strategies for reading.

The Cognitive Agenda

During the past 20 years there has been an explosive growth of knowledge about cognitive processes in reading. Researchers have focused on strategic reading (Paris et al. 1983), prior knowledge (Anderson et al. 1977), metacognition (Brown et al. 1983), and text structure (Meyer et al. 1980). Indeed, the major challenge in developing a cognitive agenda for reading instruction is deciding how to integrate the wealth of research into a manageable framework.

The cognitive agenda we envision for reading instruction focuses on students' thoughtful and selective use of strategies to enhance comprehension. The key difference from traditional instruction is that teachers and students participate more in managing personal cognitive resources than in managing skill packs, workbooks, and questions inserted in reading selections.

One promising approach derives from the work on metacognition, or awareness of one's thinking. Paris and Winograd (in press), for example, describe two fundamental aspects of metacognition as self-appraisal and self-management. As students become aware of their own thinking processes, they are better able to assess the parameters of reading tasks and the different purposes for which they read. They understand both their own abilities and appropriate strategies in more detail. This knowledge can guide their selection of strategies and the flexible use of tactics to aid comprehension and retention (Baker and Brown 1984). Students who are adept at self-appraisal and self-management are more likely to become independent strategic readers.

We hasten to add that metacognition should not be construed as an educational objective by itself. We do not advocate teaching students "recipes for thinking" or simply making them aware of cognitive parameters of tasks. Instead, metacognition can provide an instructional focus on cognitive strategies that can be used selectively to promote academic learning.

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One way teachers can use metacognition to provide an instructional focus is by helping children learn to apply various strategies that are useful before, during, and after reading. For example, in one lesson (Paris 1987), students are encouraged to act like "reading detectives" in order to examine text, find clues, and generate good plans for reading. Such prereading activities activate relevant background knowledge, teach key vocabulary words, and foster appreciation of concepts that enable students to direct their attention to critical ideas in the text.

Readers can also use effective cognitive strategies during and after reading. For example, readers who monitor their comprehension by periodically pausing, asking themselves questions, paraphrasing, and looking forward and backward in the text understand materials in greater depth than readers who simply proceed through the text identifying or pronouncing words (Garner 1987). When finished, strategic readers reexamine text in order to check their comprehension, enjoy selected aspects, or summarize the main ideas.

Developing an agenda for reading instruction that includes cognitive strategies and metacognition emphasizes the importance of active, flexible involvement on the part of the learner. Basal readers and other curricular materials can become vehicles for cognitive instruction; but thoughtful, strategic teachers are the essential element in promoting thoughtful, self-regulated learning by students.

The Motivational Agenda

We believe that developing a motivational agenda is crucial to improving reading instruction. All children cannot score above average on normative tests of reading; but all children can be encouraged to read more frequently, to enjoy what they read, to share what they read, and to develop positive attitudes about themselves as readers.

Metacognition includes self-appraisal and self-management of affective as well as cognitive components of learning. Recently, a number of researchers (e.g. Borkowski et al. in press, Paris and Winograd in press) have claimed that metacognition is ideally suited for understanding the relation between cognition and motivation because self-appraisal and self-management are not dispassionate judgments. Rather, these twin components of metacognition are influenced by a variety of affective constructs including an individual's beliefs, values, and effort. Thus, if we wish to help children develop into thoughtful and independent readers, we need to pay attention to both "skill and will" (Paris et al. 1983).

Researchers interested in achievement motivation provide a framework of goals that is useful in considering the motivational agenda for reading. Maehr (1983) argued that there are four primary goals of schooling: ego goals, extrinsic goals, social solidarity goals, and task goals. Ego goals are satisfied by competitive success; achievement comes at someone else's expense. Extrinsic goals are satisfied by obtaining external, symbolic rewards, such as money or grades. When extrinsic goals are involved, the behavior is usually perceived as work. Social solidarity goals involve gaining ap-

proval or conforming to the expectations of others, but may also be realized through cooperation and the achievement of mutual goals (Tannen 1985, Winograd and Smith 1987). Finally, task goals are realized by the intrinsic enjoyment of engaging in a particular task (Csikszentmihalyi 1977). Aesthetic reading—reading for the pleasure of the experience itself—is an illustration of task involvement in reading (Rosenblatt 1978).

The constraints on reading instruction discussed earlier focus children's and teachers' attention on ego and extrinsic goals. As children read in round-robin fashion, receive graded worksheets, or take reading tests, they are competing with one another for ego enhancement. Unfortunately, too many students do not experience regular and sustained success in this competitive environment. Indeed, such an environment may force many students, especially low achievers, to become more concerned with avoiding failure and embarrassment than with trying to learn to read (Johnston and Winograd 1985). Competition for extrinsic rewards such as grades or test scores may not develop and sustain independent motivation for reading (Ames and Ames 1984). Moreover, working for extrinsic goals may actu-

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ally interfere with the development of independent motivation. Lepper and Green (1978) found that personal interest and enjoyment in a task actually decreased when superfluous extrinsic rewards were provided.

We think that a motivational agenda for reading instruction requires a shift in emphasis toward appreciation of the importance of social solidarity and task goals. Such a shift is, in fact, becoming

evident in reading research. Fielding, Wilson, and Anderson (1986), for example, studied the role of free reading in reading instruction. These researchers found that the time spent in voluntary independent reading of trade books was the best predictor of size of vocabulary, performance on standardized tests, and reading achievement gains between 2nd and 5th grade. When they interviewed avid readers, they found that these children belonged to "communities of readers" that included peers, siblings, parents, and teachers. Clearly, the enjoyment derived from reading interesting books and the positive affect that comes from belonging to a literate community are essential to developing proficient readers.

Johnston and Winograd (1985) have argued that aesthetic reading is important because it enables children to experience reading as a task-involving situation rather than an ego-involving situation (Nicholls 1983). Such experience is especially crucial for poor readers suffering from passive failure, who are often confused about the purposes of reading and who approach reading with defensive strategies. When poor readers are aesthetically involved in reading, either through listening to a story read aloud or in free reading themselves, success is defined by the pleasurable experience itself, not by how well the child is doing compared to others. Thus, the need for defensive strategies is removed, and children are more likely to apply themselves to reading.

Innovations in Reading Instruction

To overcome the monotony and the competitive nature of traditional reading instruction, teachers need creative new methods of instruction. We recommend four related methods for helping students become thoughtful readers. These alternative practices can be used at any grade level with any established reading program.

Modeling thoughtful reading

One of the best methods for teaching reading strategies is to model appro-



appropriate behavior. Modeling tells students what to do and reveals how successful comprehension depends on the use of appropriate strategies. Observing a competent model provides students both information and motivation and is fundamental to the social collaboration that lies at the heart of learning.

Simply observing an expert reader thinking aloud or discussing strategies may not be sufficient to alter students' reading behavior, however. The value of the strategies and the procedures for using them need to be explained and demonstrated in order for students to use the strategies independently. When students believe they can emulate the model and use the strategies effectively, they enhance their own self-efficacy and motivation to succeed (Schunk 1987).

The power of modeling is not limited to teaching children the cognitive strategies required for fluent reading. When teachers take time to read aloud from their favorite books, display affective reactions to excellent literature, or share the pleasure and power that comes with writing, they convey essential motivational information to children about the nature and purposes of literacy (Winograd and Johnston 1987). In other words, modeling can be used to

teach children how to use cognitive strategies and why they are useful, but it can also be used to show students that cognitive strategies are worth the effort. Thus, modeling is most successful when children believe they can emulate the model and *want* to emulate the model (Schunk 1987, Winograd and Smith 1987).

Direct explanation

Explaining cognitive strategies to students is an essential factor in effective instruction. However, as Durkin (1978-79) has noted, teachers spend most of their time asking questions about texts, mentioning skills instead of teaching children how to use them, and assigning worksheets. Research indicates that clearer explanations of lesson objectives and cognitive strategies are necessary to improve comprehension instruction

(Paris 1986, Rosenshine 1979, Winograd and Hare 1988). Students need to understand what strategies can be used before, during, and after reading, how they are applied, and when they should be used (Paris et al. 1983).

Knowledge about comprehension strategies can be communicated to students in many ways. For example, Paris and colleagues (1984) used a variety of metaphors to discuss different comprehension strategies each week. The metaphors stimulated group discussions about cognitive strategies; these were described explicitly for students, who then practiced using them. In a study involving 50 teachers using direct explanation and whole class discussion of strategies, 3rd and 5th graders improved their metacognition and comprehension (Paris and Oka 1986).

Duffy and colleagues (1986) stress that effective direct explanation has four characteristics. First, it provides information about thinking processes and elicits responses from students. Second, effective explanation promotes students' awareness of how to solve problems that they encounter while reading. Third, information provided to students is precise and explicit and presented in a framework of meaningful reading. Fourth, effective explainers provide assistance to students by gradually presenting information of increasing complexity.

Scaffolded instruction

Effective reading instruction is responsive to the individual needs of the student. Providing assistance, challenge, and assessment helps guide each child to independent reading. These procedures for instructional dialogue are often called "scaffolded instruction" and include the following components:

- **Recruitment.** The teacher must engage the child's interest.
- **Reduction in degrees of freedom.** The teacher must reduce the size of the task to the level where the learner can cope with the task requirements.
- **Direct maintenance.** The teacher must keep the child in pursuit of the task goal.
- **Marking critical features.** The teacher must accentuate certain features of the task that the learner can use to



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compare what was actually produced with the desired "correct" production.

• **Frustration control.** The teacher must help reduce stress, making the tutorial session less stressful than if the adult had not been present.

• **Demonstration.** The teacher must demonstrate an "idealization" of the task by completing it or by explicating a solution with the expectation that the learner will "imitate" it (Langer and Applebee 1986, p. 177).

Perhaps the best-known example of scaffolded instruction is a procedure for teaching comprehension strategies called "reciprocal teaching" (Palincsar and Brown 1984). The objective of reciprocal teaching is to encourage students to exchange roles as tutor and tutee. As tutor, students lead the dialogue, model effective strategies, and explain the usefulness of strategies to other students. The teacher's role is to encourage students to discuss the strategies explicitly and negotiate text meaning as they read. Gradually, the teacher's support is withdrawn so that students discuss the meaning of text independently. Several studies reported by Palincsar and Brown (1984) indicate that reciprocal teaching produces substantial improvements in students' comprehension and generalized use of effective strategies. (See also p. 37, this issue.)

Cooperative learning

The fourth general method for enhancing comprehension strategies is cooperative learning. Traditional reading instruction is often limited to listening to the teacher, answering specific questions, or completing worksheets alone. In contrast, cooperative learning allows students to work together to discover, share, and debate ideas as they read. Oral discussions stimulate ideas and provoke conflicts that can lead to new insights as well as social cooperation (Lindow et al. 1985, Yager et al. 1985). With an emphasis on cognitive strategies, the techniques of modeling, explanation, and scaffolding can all be included in the group discussions.

To minimize competition, cooperative learning emphasizes social solidarity and joint responsibility as goals of the group. Several studies indicate that students who participate in cooperative learning are more motivated

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and less anxious than students in traditional instructional arrangements (Haines and McKeachie 1967, Slavin 1980). One of the essential features of cooperative learning is that students both give and receive help. Webb (1982) notes that giving and receiving help are both positively correlated with academic achievement.

Rethinking the Goals of Reading Instruction

Redefining the goals of reading instruction to include both cognitive and motivational components reflects a commitment to helping children understand the benefits of reading and choose to become lifelong readers. These innovations can help change our present decontextualized and competitive reading instruction to instruction that emphasizes dialogues for learning and develops communities of readers who enjoy the benefits of literacy (Winograd and Johnston 1987).

These innovations have numerous positive implications. First, they embed and connect reading, writing, and thinking throughout the curriculum.

Second, they encourage the development of skills, strategies, and attitudes that promote self-regulated learning. Third, they give social solidarity and task goals priority above ego goals and extrinsic rewards. Fourth, they emphasize the crucial role that teachers play in developing strategic readers.

Can the goals of reading be redefined? Certainly! Educators have already begun to translate cognitive strategies and metacognition into instructional techniques and materials. New tests to assess reading in a broader, more balanced fashion are being developed. Alternatives to ability-based reading groups are being studied so that modeling, direct explanation, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning can be used in conjunction with traditional methods. Finally, and most important, educators and researchers are becoming increasingly aware that a new agenda for reading instruction is worth pursuing so that children's introduction to literacy is as effective and inviting as possible. □

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