

Supporting Reading Comprehension: Responding to Books

Whenever Mrs. Johnson read aloud to the class, she began by naming the title, author, and illustrator of the book. She did this to encourage the children to look for the titles of books and the names of the people who create them. One day, during literacy center time, Damien placed *Chicken Soup With Rice* (Sendak, 1991) on the Big Book stand. He gathered an audience of three children and began by saying, "I'm going to read this book to you." Damien turned to the first page and began pretend-reading the book to the children. Patrick popped up and said, "Damien, you can't read the book yet; you forgot to read the title." Damien tapped his fist to his forehead, looked somewhat annoyed with himself, and said, "How could I forget that? The title of the book I'm going to read is *Chicken Soup With Rice*."

Damien and Patrick are demonstrating their knowledge of **concepts of books**. Damien knows that books are for reading as he pretend reads the story. He also knows that books have titles to be read before the story begins.

Concepts of Books

Knowledge about concepts of books is an important milestone on the road to literacy. Children with prior book experience may already know some concepts about print such as how to handle books, recognize the parts of a book, and recognize the difference between pictures and print. Other children will need to be taught these concepts. A child who has a good concept of books

Knowledge about concepts of books is an important milestone on the road to literacy.

- Knows that a book is for reading
- Can identify the front, back, top, and bottom of a book
- Can turn the pages of a book properly in the right direction
- Knows the difference between print and pictures
- Knows that pictures on a page are related to what the print says
- Knows where one begins reading on a page
- Knows what a title is
- Knows what an author is
- Knows what an illustrator is

Modeling Concepts of Books

We often assume that children understand basic book concepts. However, to many preschoolers, these concepts are totally unfamiliar. Therefore, teachers should read to children often and highlight book concepts at every opportunity. For example, you can introduce a story reading by pointing to the title of the book as you say, “The title of the story that I’m going to read is *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present* [Zolotow, 1977]. This is the front of the book, and these words are the title.”

On another day, you might explain, “The author of the book, the person who wrote it, is Charlotte Zolotow. Here is her name. And the illustrator, the person who drew the pictures, is Maurice Sendak. Here is his name.”

Point out these concepts. Remind the children that all books have titles and authors, and if books have pictures, they also have illustrators or photographers. Discuss the difference between photographers and illustrators. After you have discussed these concepts, suggest to the children that they look for the title whenever they read a new book. Similar dialogue helps to explain other concepts. For example, when teaching children the difference between print and pictures, you could say, “Point to a picture; now point to the print. Which do we read, the picture or the print?”

Each time you read to children in whole groups, small groups, or individually, ask them to point to the top and bottom of the book and where you should begin reading on a page. This ritual reinforces important print concepts and helps you determine which children have a firm understanding of those concepts and which children need more instruction. With repeated practice, children begin to experience books in a new way. For

example, after one 4-year-old had listened to *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 2005), she asked, “Show me where it says, ‘I think I can, I think I can.’ I want to see it in the book.” When the teacher showed her the text, the child repeated each word while pointing to it and then asked to see the words in another part of the book. She proceeded to search through the rest of the book, reading with great enthusiasm each time she found the line, “I think I can, I think I can.”

Using Big Books to Learn Concepts of Books

Big Books are an important part of early literacy instruction for children in preschool through the primary grades. The enlarged print and pictures in these books help introduce children to book concepts, print, and the meaning of text. When using Big Books in small- and large-group settings, encourage children to be actively involved. Position the Big Book so the children can see the pictures and text. You may want to place it on a stand for easier handling. You can purchase Big Books or make your own. Making Big Books in class helps children become even more aware of book concepts. Figure 11 provides directions for making a Big Book.

Big Books are effective for developing concepts about books because of their size. As the teacher reads the book and tracks the print from left to right across the page, children see that books are for reading. They notice where we begin to read on a page and learn to differentiate the print from the pictures. Children begin to realize that the reader’s spoken words are being read from the print in the book.

In addition to learning concepts of books, children need to learn to understand what is read to them. Activities that ask them to respond to literature will help them learn to comprehend.

Developing Comprehension With Preschool Children

Comprehension, the ability to read or listen and understand text, is one of the major goals of reading instruction. When preschoolers listen to stories, comprehension can be an active process. Children rely on prior knowledge to interpret and construct meaning about what they listen to (Pressley & Hilden, 2002). Social interactions during reading enhance children’s comprehension development (Teale, 1981). For example, children benefit from discussions with the adults who read to them.

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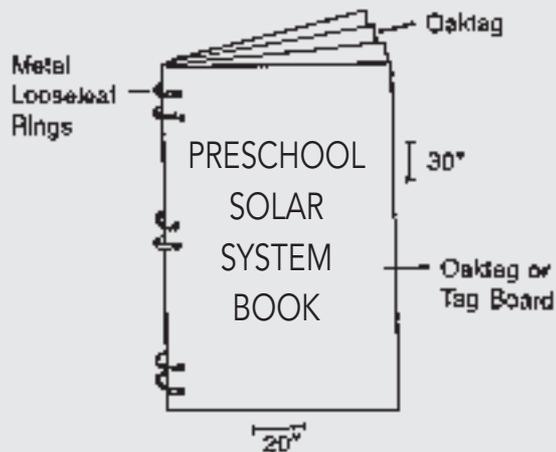
Figure 11
How to Make a Big Book

Materials

- 2 pieces of oaktag for the cover (14" × 20" to 20" × 30")
- 10 pieces or more of tagboard or newsprint the same size as the oaktag use for the cover to be used for the pages in the book
- 6 looseleaf rings (1¹/₄")
- Holepunch

Directions

- Punch three sets of holes in the top, middle, and bottom of the cover and in the paper that is to go inside of the book.
- Insert a looseleaf ring in each hole. The Big Book should have a minimum of 10 pages.
- Print should be 1¹/₂ to 2 inches high.



Reading and listening comprehension varies according to the difficulty of the text. Therefore, when reading to children, keep in mind the following text characteristics that will affect a child's level of comprehension (Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998):

- The familiarity of the content
- The background knowledge required to understand the text
- How interesting the topic is to the listener

- The **syntactic complexity** of the sentences
- The amount and difficulty of vocabulary included
- The length of a selection

The RAND Reading Study Group report (2002) and the National Reading Panel report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000) both draw from research about successful comprehension practices to consider which comprehension strategies children need to learn and how these strategies should be taught. Although much of the discussion within these reports pertains to children who are in kindergarten through third grade and older, the following findings have great significance for preschool educators. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) point out that to help young children learn to comprehend narrative and expository text, teachers need to

- Provide background information so that children have some prior knowledge of the text before it is read to them
- Ask children to anticipate and predict what might happen in a story
- Read materials to children from the beginning to end
- Refer back to the text to clarify any difficult parts
- Slow down when reading or listening to information that children need to remember and might be difficult for them
- Discuss the text with children after reading so they can reflect on ideas and summarize about what was read

The strategies that follow provide activities to engage preschoolers in learning to comprehend.

Developing Comprehension With the Directed Listening–Thinking Activity

When children read or are read to, they need a purpose for reading or listening. The **Directed Listening–Thinking Activity (DLTA)** and **Directed Reading–Thinking Activity (DRTA)** strategies set a purpose for reading and listening and help to direct children’s thinking. When teachers model these strategies through frequent use, children will internalize them and apply them when they read or listen to new material (Morrow, 1984; Stauffer, 1980).

Because this book deals with preschool education, we will focus on the DLTA. This strategy provides a framework for the listener for organizing and retrieving information. A DLTA can have many different objectives. The framework, however, is always the same: (1) preparation for listening or reading through questions and discussion, (2) reading the story with few interruptions, and (3) discussion after reading. All three steps focus on the DLTA's specific objectives. A DLTA can focus on literal responses (such as recall of facts and sequencing) and inferential responses (such as interpreting characters' feelings, predicting outcomes, and relating the story to real-life experiences). It can focus on identifying elements of story structure in both narrative and informational text. Research has demonstrated that a DLTA can increase the story comprehension of young listeners (Morrow, 1984), just as a DRTA can increase the story comprehension of young readers (Baumann, Seifert-Kessell, & Jones, 1992; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992).

The following DLTA for *The Gingerbread Man* (McCafferty, 2001) develops two skills: Sequencing the events of a story and making predictions about the text.

1. Preparation for Listening or Reading Through Questions and Discussion. It is crucial to build a background for what is going to be read to the children by introducing the story as follows: "Today I'm going to read a story called *The Gingerbread Man*. Let's look at the pictures and see if you can tell what the story is going to be about."

Encourage children to respond as you turn the pages of the book from beginning to end. This activity is sometimes called a **picture walk** (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). After the children have offered their ideas say, "This story is about a little gingerbread man who escapes from the oven and all the people in the town try to chase him because they want to eat this delicious cookie. While I'm reading, try to imagine what will happen to the gingerbread man at the end of the story and why you think this. As I read, try to remember what happened first, second, third, and at the end of the story."

Ask questions that build additional background knowledge and set a purpose for listening. Relate the questions to real-life experiences whenever possible: "Have you ever tried to chase a friend but they got away? How do you catch someone when they are running away? Can you catch them without running after them? Do you have to be fast to catch someone?"

Once children are familiar with this questioning technique, you can ask them to think of their own questions: “Now that I’ve told you a little about the story, what did you want to find out when I read it to you?”

2. Reading the Story With Few Interruptions. Be sure to show the children the pictures as you read the book. Stop only once or twice for reactions, comments, or questions. Don’t interrupt the story for lots of discussion because discussion should occur after the story is read. Remind children to study the pictures. Model or scaffold responses to guide them in their thinking, keeping in mind the objectives for this particular DLTA. Some discussion questions for *The Gingerbread Man* could include the following: “Can you remember why the gingerbread man was running? Who was trying to catch him?”

If the children do not respond, model responses by changing questions to statements: “The gingerbread man was running so fast because everyone wanted to eat him. I remember when the cow tried to eat him.” Children also can be asked to predict what will happen next.

3. Discussion After Reading. The postreading discussion may be guided by the objectives or purpose set for listening to the story such as, “What happened to the gingerbread man first? Second?”

Ask children to retell the story to demonstrate their knowledge of sequence. Allow children to use the pictures in the book to help them recall the story sequence. Finally, focus on the second goal, making predictions, and ask, “Where do you think the gingerbread man would go next if he wasn’t eaten by the fox? Do you think the fox and the gingerbread man could become friends? Why or why not? What do you think happened to all the people when they realized the gingerbread man had been eaten?”

Developing Comprehension With Shared Reading

Shared reading is usually carried out in a whole-class setting, although it may be carried out in small groups as well (Holdaway, 1979). During this activity, teachers model fluent reading for children and help them develop listening skills.

Sharing books enhances children’s background knowledge, develops their sense of story structure, and familiarizes them with the language of books (Cullinan, 1992; Morrow, 1985). The language of books differs from oral language and provides a model for speaking. The following sentences from two well-known picture storybooks make this evident:

- “His scales were every shade of blue and green and purple, with sparkling silver scales among them.” (Pfister, *The Rainbow Fish*, 1992)
- “I’m a troll from a deep dark hole, My belly’s getting thinner; I need to eat—and goat’s a treat—so I’ll have you for my dinner.” (Asbjornsen & Moe, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, 1991)

Shared reading often involves reading from a Big Book. Often the teacher uses a pointer while reading to emphasize the correspondence between spoken and written words and model the tracking of print. If the book is new to the class, the children should listen during the first reading. If the book is already familiar to the class, children should be encouraged to participate in the reading.

Children’s participation in shared reading might include chanting story refrains, reading keywords, or stopping at predictable parts and filling in words and phrases. One popular technique is echo reading, where the teacher reads one line and the children repeat it. After the first reading, the Big Book and regular-size versions should be available for children to explore independently.

Shared book readings can be audio-recorded and made available in a section of the literacy center for listening. This provides children with a familiar model of fluent reading. They can emulate the teacher’s phrasing and intonation as they “whisper read” along with the audio recording. Shared reading experiences can also be carried out using a DLTA format.

Using Predictable Texts/Stories. Predictable stories are ideal for shared reading experiences because they invite children to guess what will happen next. Predictability takes many forms. The use of catchphrases, such as “A house is a house for me” in *A House Is a House for Me* (Hoberman, 2007), encourages children to read along. Predictable rhyme, as in *Goodnight Moon* (Brown, 2005), makes it easy for children to fill in words.

Cumulative patterns contribute to predictability. New events are added with each episode, then repeated in the next, as in *Are You My Mother?* (Eastman, 2005). This book repeats phrases and episode patterns as its central character, a baby bird, searches for his mother by approaching different animals and asking the same question: “Are you my mother?”

Look for books that highlight familiar sequences, such as days of the week, months of the year, letters, and numbers, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1994). Conversation can also contribute to predictabil-

ity, as in *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Asbjornsen & Moe, 1991) or *The Three Little Pigs* (Galdone, 1984).

Predictable books are excellent for young children who are just beginning to experiment with **emergent literacy** practices, as well as for conventional readers. They allow the child's first experience with reading to be enjoyable and successful with minimal effort. Such immediate success encourages the child to continue efforts at reading.

Repeated Reading. When a story is read repeatedly, it becomes familiar and comfortable, like singing a well-known song. In addition to offering the pleasure of familiarity, repeated storybook readings help children develop concepts about words, print, and books. In a study with 4-year-olds (Morrow, 1987), one group listened to three repeated readings of the same story and the other group listened to three different stories. In an analysis of the discussions that followed the stories, the researchers found that during the course of the study, the responses of the children in the repeated reading group grew in number, variety, and complexity in comparison to the group that had a different story read to them each time. The children in the repeated reading group's responses became more interpretive and they began to predict outcomes and make associations, judgments, and elaborative comments. Children also began to narrate stories as the teacher read and to focus on elements of print, asking names of letters and words. Even children of low ability seemed to make more responses with repeated readings than with a single reading (Morrow, 1987; Pressley & Hilden, 2002).

Repeated readings promote independent reading; children can confidently revisit a familiar book without adult assistance. Children who are able to read independently or participate in pretend-reading behaviors often will select the same book to look at or read over and over again. Teachers can repeat readings of stories to children in a shared reading setting, encourage children to look at books more than once, and carry out discussions about books that have been read and discussed previously.

The following example of a 4-year-old child's responses to a third reading of *The Little Red Hen* highlights the child's comments and questions and the teacher's responses; most of the story text has been omitted.



Teacher: Today I'm going to read a story called *The Little Red Hen*. It is about a hen who wanted some help when she baked some bread. [The teacher begins to read the story.] "Who will help me to cut this wheat?"

Melony: "'Not I,' said the cat. 'Not I,' said the dog. 'Not I,' said the mouse."

Teacher: That was good, Melony. You are reading. [The teacher continues reading.] "Who will take this wheat to the mill to be ground into flour?"

Melony: "'Not I,' said the cat. 'Not I,' said the dog. 'Not I,' said the mouse with the whiskers."

Teacher: Very nice, Melony. [The teacher continues to read.]

Melony: I want to read that part, but I don't know how.

Teacher: Go ahead and try. I bet you can. I'll help you: "The cat smelled it."

Melony: [The child pretend reads parts she remembers from the repeated readings.] "The cat smelled it and she said 'umm that smells good,' and the mouse smelled it, and it smelled good."

Teacher: [The teacher continues reading.] "Who will eat this cake?"

Melony: "The mouse, the doggy, the kitty!"

Teacher: You're right again, Melony. [The teacher reads to the end of the story.] Did you want to say anything else about the story?

Melony: He was bad so he couldn't have no cake. [Melony searches through the pages.] That's the wrong part.

Teacher: Show me the part you are talking about.

Melony: There it is, almost at the end. She's going to make a cake and she'll say, "Who's going to bake this cake for me?" And the cat says, "Not I," the dog says, "Not I," the mouse says, "Not I." And then when she's cooking it they smell a good thing and then they wanted some, too, but they didn't have any, 'cause they didn't plant the wheat.

Teacher: That's terrific, Melony.

(Morrow, 2005, pp. 171–172)



This type of sophisticated response can only happen when a child has heard a story repeated many times.

As adults we often tire of repetition; however, it has great value in early reading development. Sulzby (1985) observed children from ages 2 to 6 as they attempted to read favorite storybooks. Although they were not yet readers in the conventional sense, the children were asked, “Read me your book.” Sulzby found that the speech children used in their “reading” was clearly different in structure and intonation from their typical conversations. They used vocabulary and syntax from the story. Children also demonstrated different developmental levels in children’s oral “readings.”

Figure 12 offers a classification scheme for children’s emergent reading of favorite storybooks. To use this checklist, ask a child to read a story that is well known to him or her. Preschoolers will not read conventionally. However, from their attempts at storybook reading it is possible to observe characteristics of their emergent reading behavior.

Developing Comprehension With Small-Group and One-to-One Story Readings

The importance of reading to small groups and to individuals must not be overlooked. Too often considered impractical in school settings, one-to-one and small-group readings yield such tremendous benefits that they should be incorporated into preschool programs.

Small-group and one-to-one readings are effective in the preschool classroom because it is easier for preschoolers to pay attention to the teacher in settings with small numbers of children. One of the greatest benefits of one-to-one story reading is the interaction that results. Children gain a great deal of information from this close interaction, while adults discover what children know and what they want to learn.

It has been found that one-to-one readings are especially beneficial for preschoolers who have had little experience with books at home (Morrow, 1988). When reading in small groups or in a one-to-one setting, it is important for teachers to encourage children to be interactive by asking them to respond to questions, discuss pictures in the book, and chant repeated phrases.

When teachers read to children frequently and initiate interactive discussions, the number and complexity of the children’s responses increases.

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Figure 12
Classification Scheme for Children's Emergent
Reading of Favorite Storybooks

1. Attends to pictures but does not form oral stories

The child "reads" by labeling and commenting on the pictures in the book, but does not "weave a story" across the pages.

yes___ no___

2. Attends to pictures and forms oral stories

The child "reads" by following the pictures and "weaves a story" across the pages, using the wording and intonation of a storyteller. Often, however, the listener must see the pictures in order to understand the story the child is "reading."

yes___ no___

3. Attends to a mix of pictures, reading, and storytelling

The child "reads" by looking at the pictures. The majority of the child's "reading" fluctuates between the oral intonation of a storyteller and that of a reader.

yes___ no___

4. Attends to pictures and forms stories with characteristics of written language

The child "reads" by looking at the pictures. The child's speech sounds like reading, both in wording and intonation. The listener rarely needs to see the pictures in order to understand the story. With his or her eyes closed, the listener would think the child was reading print. The "reading" is similar to the story in print and sometimes follows it verbatim. There is some attention to print.

yes___ no___

5. Attends to print

a) The child reads the story, mostly by attending to print, but occasionally refers to pictures and reverts to storytelling. yes___ no___

b) The child reads in a conventional manner. yes___ no___

Note. Adapted from Sulzby (1985).

Children offer many questions and comments that focus on meaning. Initially, they label illustrations; eventually they give more attention to details. Their comments and questions become interpretive and predictive and they draw from their own experiences. They also begin narrating—that is, "reading" or mouthing the story along with the teacher.

When involved in frequent small group or one-to-one storybook readings, children begin to focus on structural elements in a story, remarking on titles, settings, characters, and story events. After many readings, the

children begin to focus on print, matching sounds and letters and reading words (Morrow, 1987). When children hear stories in small groups, they tend to respond more; they repeat one another's remarks and elaborate on what their peers have said. Table 4 provides guidelines for teacher interactive behavior during small-group and one-to-one story readings, and Figure 13 shows interactive behavior during a small-group story reading.

Productive discussions result from good questions. Good questions ask children to clarify information and predict outcomes. The following is a description of types of questions.

Literal questions ask students to

- Identify details such as who, what, when and where
- Classify ideas
- Sequence text
- Find the main idea

Table 4
Guidelines for Teacher Interactive Behavior During Small-Group and One-to-One Storybook Reading

| Teacher Role | Specifics |
|--------------------|--|
| Manage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce story. • Provide background information about the book. • Redirect irrelevant discussion back to the story. |
| Prompt Responses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children to ask questions or comment throughout the story when there are natural places to stop. • Model responses for children if they are not responding (e.g., "Those animals aren't very nice. They won't help the little red hen.>"). • Relate responses to real-life experiences (e.g., "I needed help when I was preparing a party, and my family shared the work. Did you ever ask for help and not get it? What happened?"). • When children do not respond, ask questions that require answers other than yes or no (e.g., "What would you have done if you were the little red hen and no one helped you bake the bread?"). |
| Support and Inform | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer questions as they are asked. • React to comments. • Relate your responses to real-life experiences. • Provide positive reinforcement for children's responses. |

Note. From Morrow (1988).

Figure 13
Interactive Behavior During Small-Group Reading



Inferential and *critical* questions ask students to

- Draw information from their background knowledge
- Relate text to life experiences
- Predict outcomes (What do you think will happen next?)
- Interpret text (Put yourself in the place of the characters)
- Compare and contrast
- Determine cause and effect
- Apply information
- Solve problems

Discussion questions should reflect children's interests and have many appropriate responses rather than just one correct answer. Questions with one correct answer can be asked occasionally, but the majority of questions should stimulate discussion and invite children to share their thoughts and

feelings about the text. Include a few questions that deal with facts, main ideas, and story details. When asking questions, have children refer to the illustrations for possible answers. Once children are experienced at responding to questions, they can be encouraged to ask their own questions about a story that was read to them.

The following examples of small-group story readings in preschool illustrate the kinds of questions children ask and responses they make when they are engrossed in the reading experience. The examples reveal the rich information children receive from the adult reader and indicate what the children already know and what their interests are—useful information for anyone designing instruction.



Story: *A Splendid Friend Indeed* (Bloom, 2007)—The child asks questions about book concepts.

Madeline: [points to the illustration on the book cover] Why does it have a picture on it?

Teacher: The cover of the book has a picture on it so you will know what the story is about. Look at the picture. Can you tell what the book might be about?

Jeanine: Ummm, I think it is about a big white furry bear and a duck and they like each other because they are smiling at each other.

Teacher: You're right, very good. The book is about a polar bear and a duck and they are good friends. The title of the book is *A Splendid Friend Indeed*. The pictures on the cover of a book and inside the book can help you figure out what the words say.



Story: *A Splendid Friend Indeed* (Bloom, 2007)—The child asks for a definition.

Teacher: I'm going to read the story *A Splendid Friend Indeed*.

Jeannine: What is *splendid*?

Teacher: *Splendid* means wonderful, very good, terrific. Do you have a splendid friend?

Jeannine: Devin is my best friend. I guess she is splendid. I will tell her.

Story: *Are You My Mother?* (Eastman, 2005)—The child attends to print.

Jordon: Wait, stop reading. Let me see this again. [He looks at the page.] That says, "Are you my mother?"

Teacher: You're right. Can you find it anywhere else?

Jordon: I think so. Yes, here it is on this page. "Are you my mother?" And again over here, "Are you my mother?"

Teacher: That is great, you are reading.

Story: *The Mitten* (Tresselt, 1989)—The child predicts.

Charlene: I wonder if that mitten is going to break open?

Teacher: Why do you think that?

Charlene: Well, it is a mitten for a little boy so it isn't so big. All of those animals are going in it. Soon they won't fit.

Teacher: Those are good ideas, Charlene. I'll read on and we will find out if you are right.

Story: *Knuffle Bunny* (Willems, 2004)—The child makes connections from one text to another.

James: Hey this book is like the Mary Poppins DVD.

Teacher: What do you mean?

James: Well, you see the pictures in *Knuffle Bunny* in the back are real like real buildings and parks and stuff someone took those pictures with a camera of real things, and the pictures in the front are cartoons somebody drew. In the Mary Poppins DVD there are real people and then sometimes there are cartoon people and cartoon pictures, too.

Story: *Madeline's Rescue* (Bemelmans, 2000)—The child relates the text to real-life experience.

Jovannah: What's the policeman going to do?

Teacher: He's going to help Madeline. Policemen are nice; they always help us.

Jovannah: Policemans aren't nice. See, my daddy beat up Dominic and the policeman came and took him away and put him in jail. And my Daddy cried and I cried. I don't like policemans. I don't think they are nice.



These examples reveal children's understanding of text. The children's comments and questions relate to literal meanings; they raise interpretive and critical issues by associating the story with their own lives, predict what will happen next in a story, or express judgments about characters' actions. Their responses also relate to matters of print, such as names of letters, words, and sounds.

Analyzing one-to-one and small-group story readings reveals what children know and what they want to know about the texts that are read to them (Morrow, 1987). The coding sheet in Figure 14 will help in this analysis. The coding is a form of assessment-guided instruction that teachers can use to determine what the child knows and then decide what needs to be done to accommodate the children's needs when designing instruction.

Although whole-class readings are practical and effective in exposing children to literature, they do not promote the interaction between adults and children that takes place in one-to-one and small-group readings. If we review transcripts of story readings in all three settings, several things become apparent. In whole-group settings, children are discouraged from asking questions or commenting during the story because doing so interrupts the flow of the story for the rest of the audience. In this setting, the discussion has to be managed by the teacher to such an extent that he or she often talks more than the children do. Because of the size of the group, a truly interactive situation cannot exist. However, in small-group and one-to-one story readings, a teacher may manage and prompt the discussion at first, but only to encourage and model responses for children. The roles reverse in a short time, and soon most of the dialogue is initiated by the children (Morrow, 1987).

Children who do not experience one-to-one readings at home are at a disadvantage in their literacy development. By reading to a child individually

Figure 14

Coding Children's Responses During Story Readings

Directions: Read a story to one child or a small group of children. Encourage the children to respond with questions and comments. Record the session. Transcribe or listen to the recording, noting each child's responses by placing checks in the appropriate categories. A category may receive more than one check, and a single response may be credited to more than one category. Total the number of checks in each category.

Child's Name _____ Date _____

Name of Story _____

1. Focus on Story Structure

- identifies setting (time, place)
- identifies characters
- identifies theme (problem or goal)
- recalls plot episodes (events leading toward problem solution or goal attainment)
- identifies resolution

2. Focus on Meaning

- labels pictures
- identifies details
- interprets characters and events (makes associations, elaborations)
- predicts events
- draws from personal experience
- seeks definitions of words
- uses narrational behavior (recites parts of the book along with the teacher)

3. Focus on Print

- asks questions or makes comments about letters
- asks questions or makes comments about sounds
- asks questions or makes comments about words
- reads words
- reads sentences

4. Focus on Illustrations

- asks questions or makes comments about illustrations

Note. From Lesley Mandel Morrow, *Literacy Development in the Early Years: Helping Children Read and Write*, 6th Edition. Published by Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 2009 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

in the classroom, the teacher can compensate for what is not provided at home. With frequent one-to-one reading, children gain both literacy skills and positive attitudes toward books; they learn to associate books with warmth and pleasure. Time limitations and class size make it difficult to provide one-to-one and small-group readings in school, but asking aides, volunteers, and older children to help can alleviate the problem.

Developing Comprehension With Story Retellings

Encouraging children to retell stories they have listened to or read helps them develop vocabulary, syntax, comprehension, and sense of story structure (Ritchie et al., 2002). Retelling allows for original thinking as children incorporate their own life experiences into their retelling (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985). With practice in retelling, children come to assimilate the concept of narrative or expository text structure. They learn to introduce a narrative story with its beginning and its setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution. They also learn to retell narrative text by focusing on a particular aspect such as story structure, cause and effect, or problem and solution. In retelling stories, children demonstrate their comprehension of story details and sequence. They also interpret the sounds and expressions of characters' voices. In retelling expository text, children review what they've learned and distinguish the main ideas from the supporting details.

Retelling is not an easy task for children, but with practice they improve quickly. Be sure to inform children before they listen to a story that they will be asked to retell it (Morrow, 1996). Further instructions depend on the purpose of the retelling. If the intent is to teach sequence, for instance, then children should be asked to think about what happened first, second, and so on. If the goal is to teach children to make inferences from the text, ask them to think of personal experiences that are similar to those that happened in the story. Props such as flannelboard characters or book illustrations can be used to help children retell. Pre- and postdiscussion of text helps to improve retelling ability, as does the teacher's modeling a retelling for children.

Retelling also allows adults to evaluate children's progress. When assessing a retelling, do not offer prompts beyond general ones such as "What happened next?" or "Can you think of anything else?" Retellings of narrative text reveal a child's sense of story structure, focusing mostly on

literal recall, but they also reflect a child’s inferential thinking. To assess the child’s retelling for sense of story structure, first divide the events of the story into four categories—setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution. Refer to the guidelines for story retelling (see Table 5), and use an outline of the text to record the number of ideas and details the child includes within each category in the retelling, regardless of their order. Credit the child for partial recall or for recounting the “gist” of an event (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). Evaluate the child’s sequencing ability by comparing the order of events in the child’s retelling with the proper order of setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution. The analysis indicates not only which elements the child includes or omits and how well the child

Table 5
Guidelines for Story Retelling

| Teacher Role | Examples |
|--|--|
| 1. Ask the child to retell the story. | “A little while ago, I read the story [name of story]. Would you tell the story as if you were telling it to a friend who has never heard it before?” |
| 2. Use prompts only if needed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the child has difficulty beginning the retelling, suggest beginning with “Once upon a time....” or “Once there was....” • If the child stops retelling before the end of the story, encourage continuation by asking, “What comes next?” or “Then what happened?” • If the child stops retelling and cannot continue with general prompts, ask a question that is relevant at the point in the story at which the child has paused. For example, “What was Jenny’s problem in the story?” |
| 3. When a child is unable to retell the story, or if the retelling lacks sequence and detail, prompt the retelling step by step. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Once upon a time....” or “Once there was....” • “Who was the story about?” • “When did the story happen? Day or night? Summer or winter?” • “Where did the story happen?” • “What was the main character’s problem in the story?” • “How did he or she try to solve the problem? What did he or she do first? Second? Next?” • “How was the problem solved?” • “How did the story end?” |

Note. From Morrow (1996).

Philip: *Franklin in the Dark*. One time Franklin didn't want to go in his shell. He was too scared. But his Mama says there's nothing in there. But Franklin didn't want to go in the shell because he thought there was monsters in there. He didn't like to go in because he was scared. It was dark. At the end he went in, he turned on a little nightlight and went to sleep. That's it.



Retellings can be evaluated for many different comprehension tasks. The directions to students prior to retelling and the method of analysis should match the goal. Figure 16 provides an analysis form for evaluating a retelling. The teacher checks for elements a child includes and determines progress over time.

Figure 16
Analysis of Story Retelling and Rewriting

Setting

- Begins story with an introduction
- Names main character
- Lists other characters
- Includes statement about time and place

Theme

- Refers to main character's primary goal or problem to be solved

Plot Episodes

- Recalls episodes
- Lists episodes recalled

Resolution

- Includes the solution to the problem or the attainment of the goal
- Includes an ending to the story

Sequence

- Tells story in a sequential order

In his retelling, Philip names the main characters, Franklin and Franklin's mother. Philip restates the problem, the main character, and the theme. He understands the resolution of the story and his retelling has a clear ending. The parts of the story that Philip included are told in sequential order. However, Philip's retelling does not begin with an introduction. There is no statement of time and place. Aside from mentioning Franklin and his mother, Philip does not talk about any of the other four characters, nor does he recall any of the plot episodes in the story. From this evaluation, it is evident that Philip is able to recall the theme of the story, the resolution; future instruction should focus on recalling story details such as characters and plot episodes and beginning retellings with an introduction.

To illustrate progress over time, the following is a sample of a retell of *Jenny Learns a Lesson* (Fujikawa, 1980) by Philip at the end of the school year, eight months after the first retell (the first part of this example is an outline of the story, and the second part of the example is the student's retelling).



Story Outline

1. Once upon a time there was a girl who liked to play pretend.
2. Characters: Jenny (main character), Nicholas, Sam, Mei Su, and Shags, the dog.

Theme

Every time Jenny played with her friends, she bossed them.

Plot Episodes

- First episode: Jenny decided to pretend to be a queen. She called her friends. They came to play. Jenny told them all what to do and was bossy. The friends became angry and left.
- Second episode: Jenny decided to play dancer. She called her friends and they came to play. Jenny told them all what to do. The friends became angry and left.
- Third episode: Jenny decided to play pirate. She called her friends and they came to play. Jenny told

them all what to do. The friends became angry and left.

Fourth episode: Jenny decided to play duchess. She called her friends and they came to play. Jenny told them all what to do. The friends became angry and left.

Fifth episode: Jenny's friends refused to play with her because she was so bossy. Jenny became lonely and apologized to them for being bossy.

Resolution

1. The friends all played together, and each person did what he or she wanted to do.
2. They all had a wonderful day and were so tired that they fell asleep.

Student's Retelling

Once upon a time there's a girl named Jenny and she called her friends over and they played queen and went to the palace. They had to, they had to do what she said and they didn't like it so then they went home and said that was boring. It's not fun playing queen and doing what she says you have to. So they didn't play with her for seven days and she had she had an idea that she was being selfish, so she went to find her friends and said, I'm sorry I was so mean. And said, let's play pirate, and they played pirate and they went onto the ropes. Then they played that she was a fancy lady playing house. And they have tea. And they played what they wanted and they were happy. The end.



In this retelling of the story, Philip includes more characters, details, and episodes than he did in his first retelling, illustrating his progress in developing comprehension skills.

Developing Comprehension With Collaborative Strategies

The National Reading Panel report suggests that collaboration is an important strategy for developing comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Collaborative

settings allow children to engage in productive conversations as they exchange ideas and learn to listen to each other. Teachers model the behaviors for collaborative activities before children participate in them with peers.

Collaborative settings allow children to engage in productive conversations as they exchange ideas and learn to listen to each other.

Buddy Reading. Buddy reading involves pairing a child from an upper grade with a younger child. The child in the upper grade is instructed how to read to children. At specified times during the school week, buddies get together for storybook reading and discussions.

Partner Reading. Partner reading involves peers reading together. This may simply mean that the children sit next to each other and share the same book. They take turns discussing the pictures or narrating the text.

Mental Imagery and Think-Alouds. In mental imagery, children are asked to visualize what they see after they have been read to. Then, they are asked to conduct a **think-aloud**—to think aloud and talk about their images with peers and to predict what will happen next in the story. Children are encouraged to raise questions about the story and to look back at the pictures to recall forgotten details. They are also encouraged to personalize the text by relating their own experiences and actions to those in the story. Visualizing ideas and relating those visualizations orally to a peer helps young readers clarify information and increase understanding (Gambrell & Koskinen, 2002).

Fluency

The ultimate goal for reading instruction is that students be fluent readers. When a child is a fluent reader, he or she is able to automatically and accurately decode text and read with appropriate pace and expression, thus demonstrating comprehension (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). Most preschoolers do not yet read conventionally, let alone fluently; however, even as listeners, they can participate in fluency activities. Fluency activities should be a daily part of the preschool curriculum. They are easy for teachers to plan, require little time, and are enjoyable for children (Rasinski, 1990).

Fluency is an underemphasized skill in literacy instruction. According to the National Reading Panel report (NICHD, 2000), helping children to become fluent readers is crucial for literacy development. Other researchers have found that echo reading, choral reading, and audio recording–assisted reading expose children to the rhythm, pace, and expression involved in

fluent reading and are useful strategies for developing fluency (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). For the preschool classroom, these strategies can easily be adapted to echo chanting, choral chanting, and audio recording–assisted listening.

Echo Chanting. In echo reading, the teacher reads one line of text and the child then reads the same line. In echo chanting, children listen and then repeat what has been read to them. When reading to the children, be sure to model accuracy, pace, and expression. Try to echo chant a few times a week.

Choral Chanting. In choral reading, the entire class, or a small group of children, reads a passage together. The teacher provides a model for pace and expression. Preschoolers who aren't yet conventional readers can chorally chant poems they have learned. In choral chanting, children experience the pace and expression necessary for fluent reading. Try to choral chant a few times a week.

Audio Recording–Assisted Listening. Listening to fluent reading on audiotapes, CDs, or DVDs while following the pictures in a book provides an excellent model of reading for children. These recordings can be purchased or made by teachers, parents, and other students who are fluent readers.

Assessment of Concepts of Books and Comprehension

The techniques described in this chapter are designed to develop concepts about books and story comprehension through the use of expository and narrative text. The skills listed in Figure 17 for assessing concepts of books and comprehension of text can be used to check student progress. To determine how much children know about books, observe how they handle books. Have one-to-one interviews with children; encourage whole-group, small-group, or individual discussions. Children's story comprehension can be demonstrated and evaluated through their story retelling, attempted reading of favorite storybooks, role-playing, picture sequencing, use of puppets or flannelboards to reenact stories, and their questions and comments during storybook reading. When possible, keep

periodic performance samples of activities, such as audio or video recordings of retellings.

Throughout this chapter, assessment tools for evaluating children's ability and needs have been provided. These materials can be placed in a child's portfolio or folder to evaluate his or her concepts of books, comprehension of text, and fluent chanting. Information about children's needs can be collected in September with assessment measures repeated a few times during the school year.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRE- AND INSERVICE TEACHERS

This chapter is filled with strategies to help your children comprehend. At a study group meeting have different teachers select a different strategy, such as one of the following:

- Conducting a story retelling
- Creating a DLTA
- Creating a shared reading lesson
- Doing repeated readings of the same story
- Reading to small groups of children to see the effect on discussion
- Engaging children in teacher-generated questions and helping them think of their own questions modeled after those the teacher asked

Reflect upon how the children responded and seemed to improve their comprehension. Each teacher needs to eventually try all the strategies and decide which they like best or what is best for which children.

In addition, if there is a coach in your building and you would like to see a strategy put into practice, it would be very helpful for you to observe a person who has used the strategy before using it with your children.

Teach your children to retell a story, first with the book or with props and then without. Use the prompts in this chapter to help the child with retelling. Have the children retell a story at three different times in the year. Fill out the story retelling form at each retelling and watch for progress, strengths, and weaknesses to teach to.

Figure 17
Assessing Concepts of Books and Comprehension of Text

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

YES NO

| Concepts of Books | | |
|---|--|--|
| Knows a book is for reading | | |
| Can identify the front, back, top, and bottom of a book | | |
| Can turn the pages properly | | |
| Knows the difference between the print and the pictures | | |
| Knows pictures are related to what the print says on a page | | |
| Knows where to begin reading | | |
| Knows what a title is | | |
| Knows what an author is | | |
| Knows what an illustrator is | | |
| Comprehension of Text | | |
| "Reads" storybooks resulting in well-formed stories | | |
| Participates in story reading by narrating as the teacher reads | | |
| Retells stories | | |
| Includes story structure elements in story retellings | | |
| Setting | | |
| Theme | | |
| Plot episodes | | |
| Resolution | | |
| Recognizes expository text features and structures | | |
| Table of contents | | |
| Headings | | |
| Diagrams | | |

(continued)

Figure 17 (continued)

| | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|
| Recognizes expository text structures | | |
| Description | | |
| Compare and contrast | | |
| Cause and effect | | |
| Problem and solution | | |
| Exemplification | | |
| Responds to text after listening with literal comments or questions | | |
| Responds to text after listening with interpretive comments or questions | | |
| Participates and responds during | | |
| Partner reading | | |
| Buddy reading | | |
| Mental imagery | | |
| Think-alouds | | |
| Participates in fluency activities | | |
| Echo chanting | | |
| Choral chanting | | |
| Audio recording–assisted listening | | |
| Comments: | | |

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