FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

(Developed by Glass, C. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2005)

Rationale:

Reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from text (Sweet & Snow, 2003). There are three interactive elements which impact comprehension: the reader, the text, and the context. The reader is doing the comprehension. The reader's capabilities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences impact the act of reading. The text is anything that is read. The context is the activities of which comprehension is a part. There are three dimensions to these activities: purpose (why is the reader reading the text); processes (what mental activity must the reader engage in); and consequences (what did the reader learn or experience as a result of reading the text) (Sweet & Snow, 2003). This month, our reading strategy will focus on the text.

There are two major types of text – narrative and expository. The structural pattern, or the way information is organized, and the relationships those ideas form to communicate meaning are different. Narrative text typically follows a single general structural pattern often called story grammar. Expository text comes in a variety of patterns; for example, description, sequence, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem solution.

Expository, or informational texts convey and communicate factual information. This type of text generally contains more unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts and fewer ideas related to personal experience as well as a variety of structures. Many times, students are not familiar with the types of text structures that are found in their expository textbooks. This unfamiliarity impedes their comprehension. Expository text is generally more difficult to comprehend due to the variety of structures and unfamiliar content (Williams, 2005).

Skilled readers use a variety of strategies to comprehend written text. Students do not develop these skills without explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. Research shows, however, that explicit teaching of comprehension is uncommon (Dymock, 2005). It is not surprising then that many students struggle to comprehend written text used, especially the complex expository text used in content area classrooms. Dymock (2005) compiled a summary of key research findings related to expository text.

- Many students have problems comprehending expository text. According to Dymock, one reason for this is that students can't see the basic structure of text.
- According to Moor, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik, as well as Pressley and Vacca, students require direct instruction in how to go about comprehending more complex expository text structures.
- According to Pearson and Duke, and Smolkin and Donovan, teachers play an important role in helping students develop an awareness of expository text structure.
- According to Dymock and Nicholson's study, students who have a good understanding of expository text structure have fewer problems with comprehension.
- Pearson and Duke's study revealed that teaching expository text structure awareness has a positive effect on reading comprehension.
- Snow and Sweet (2003) discuss the importance of explicitly and systematically teaching text structure awareness.
- In a study conducted by Duke, teachers must explicitly teach comprehension strategies to assist students with the comprehension of expository text.

Research in early childhood classrooms reveals an overwhelming emphasis on narrative texts (Duke, 2000). Duke found that students in classrooms she observed spent on average only 3.6 minutes with informational text per day. Another observational study conducted by Fisher and Heibert (cited in Moss, 2004) revealed that strategies for reading expository text were not modeled at all in primary literacy classrooms. As children enter upper elementary school, they are unprepared to deal with the increasing comprehension demands. In fact researchers (Hall, Sabey, McClellan, 2005) feel that this neglect of expository text in the primary grades may be a major contributor to the decline in reading achievement after third grade. Effective use of expository texts in early childhood classrooms may help to minimize what researchers have referred to as the "fourth-grade slump." Preparing children to comprehend expository texts is integral to success in later schooling and beyond.

Many studies have shown text comprehension is improved when instruction is designed to teach students to recognize the underlying structure of text (Williams, 2005). Instruction on text structure involves teaching students to identify the important structural elements of a particular type of text. It involves acquiring knowledge about text and using this knowledge strategically. Teachers can easily and effectively communicate patterns of text structure by implementing simple strategies

into their everyday teaching methods. Using the "think aloud" strategy is useful in defining cue words and how they can be used to extract meaning from the text. Teachers can indicate signal words and explain their meanings while reading a passage out loud. Having students construct their own paragraphs using one of the text patterns can also be effective.

How to Use the Strategy:

The teaching of expository text structures can begin as early as kindergarten and become increasingly sophisticated as students move through the grades. Each text structure should be taught individually as students need time to master one structure before learning another. Students may be able to grasp easier text structures like sequence and comparison contrast so teachers may want to teach these structures first. Harder structures for students to grasp are description, cause and effect, and problem solution. Teaching students the text structures that writers use and showing them how to organize that material positively impacts comprehension (Dymock, 2005). Using graphic organizers demonstrates how text is constructed and enables readers to make order out of the text. Moss (2004) offers a clear sequence for teaching expository text structures.

1. Introduce the organizational pattern. Explain to students that expository texts (such as the text in their science and social studies textbooks) have different organizational patterns. These organizational patters are called text structures.
2. Explain the text pattern and when the writer uses it. Point out the signal words associated with the structure and share an example.

Text Structure	Description	Signal Words
Description/List Structure	This structure resembles an outline. Each section opens with its main idea, then elaborates on it, sometimes dividing the elaboration into subsections. EXAMPLE: A book may tell all about whales or describe what the geography is like in a particular region.	For example, for instance, specifically, in particular, in addition
Cause and Effect Structure	In texts that follow this structure, the reader is told the result of an event or occurrence and the reasons it happened. EXAMPLE: Weather patterns could be described that explain why a big snowstorm occurred.	Consequently, therefore, as a result, thereby, leads to
Comparison/Contrast Structure	Texts that follow this structure tell about the differences and similarities of two or more objects, places, events or ideas by grouping their traits for comparison. EXAMPLE: A book about ancient Greece may explain how the Spartan women were different from the Athenian women.	However, unlike, like, by contrast, yet, in comparison, although, whereas, similar to, different from
Order/Sequence Structure	Texts that follow this structure tell the order in which steps in a process or series of events occur. EXAMPLE: A book about the American revolution might list the events leading to the war. In another book, steps involved in harvesting blue crabs might be told.	Next, first, last, second, another, then, additionally

3. Model ways students can determine text structures when signal words are not used. The table of contents and headings can help in this area.

4.   Introduce a graphic organizer for the pattern.

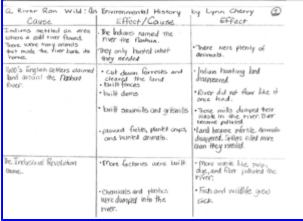| Text Structure	Organizer
Description/List Structure	Descriptive Pattern [pdf] Describing Qualities
Cause and Effect Structure	Cause-Effect Pattern [pdf] Process/Cause and Effect
Comparison/Contrast Structure	Comparison/Contrast Venn Diagramm Venn Variations
Order/Sequence Structure	Sequence Pattern [pdf] Chronological Sequence

5.   Read aloud the text illustrating the appropriate text structure. Ask students to listen for signal words that can help them identify the structure.
6.   Using the overhead projector, involve the class in completing a graphic organizer illustrating the text type.
7.   Ask students to work in pairs to locate examples of the structure in other text. Students can search for examples of signal words, as well as headings and other text features to guide their search.
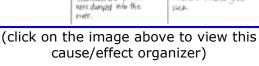8.   Have students diagram these structures using a graphic organizer.
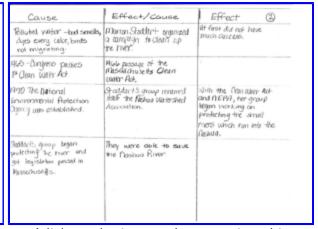
Assessment:

The goal of reading is to maximize students' interaction with text- the more students get involved with text, the higher the probability of them constructing meaning from that text. How authors organize their ideas is a powerful factor in learning with texts (Vacca & Vacca, 1999). The more a student perceives the pattern of text, the more likely they are to remember and interpret the ideas they encounter during their reading.

Graphic organizers assist students in outlining important information that is reflected in the text patterns authors use to organize ideas. By constructing the graphic organizer the student maps the relationship among the ideas presented in the text. Graphic organizers should be used as a valuable tool in helping students comprehend expository text and retain information. Teachers can also use graphic organizers as an assessment tool.

Below is an elementary student's cause/effect matrix that was created after reading A River Ran Wild: An Environmental History by Lynn Cherry. The teacher can clearly see the student is able to identify cause/effect text structure within the book. This book also works well with problem/solution text structure.

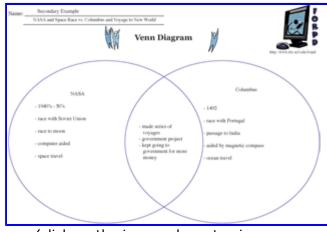(click on the image above to view this cause/effect organizer)

(click on the image above to view this cause/effect organizer)

Below is a secondary student's use of a Venn diagram. The teacher modeled comparison and contrast text with a short piece of text from an FCAT review book. The text compared and constrasted Columbus's voyage to the new world with that of NASA's space race with the Soviet Union. After students completed the Venn diagram, they were prompted to complete an FCAT style short response on how the author organized the text.

(click on the image above to view venn
diagram)

Retellings are another way teachers can assess student understanding of text structure. Retellings are oral or written post readings in which the students relate what they remember from reading the text (Moss, 2004). According to Bromley (as cited in Moss, 2004), retellings provide a holistic representation of student understanding rather than the fragmented information provided by answering comprehension questions. Retellings help students develop summarization skills. Students who are unable to retell information from their reading will find it hard to effectively summarize. "Reconstructing texts through retellings helps children develop reading flexibility as well as knowledge of text forms, text conventions, and the processes involved in text construction," (Moss, 2004, p. 712). Teachers can gain insight into how students engage with text, how much information students retain after reading, ways students construct meaning from texts, and their ability to organize information.

Moss (2004) developed a two-phase sequence that can be used to facilitate student development of expository retelling skills. First, teachers must model the process for students. Using text that has clear structures like sequence or compare/contrast and then moving to more complex structures like cause/effect will assist students in learning how to do retellings. Teachers must then provide practice for students so that they can experience the process themselves. Practice is typically done in pairs where one student is retelling and the other is listening to the retelling. Individual retellings can be used as a means of assessment.

Teacher Modeling (Moss, 2004)

Step 1: Model how to use prereading activities to activate prior knowledge and stimulate thinking about the content of the book.

Step 2: During the reading of the book, point out specific text features that facilitate the retelling of the text.

Step 3: After reading, retell the text as completely as possible.

Step 4: Model more elaborate retellings including analogies, personal anecdotes, and imagery.

Rubrics provide a framework for teacher evaluation of student retellings. The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory provides a scoring rubric from Mitchell and Irwin at http://www.ncrel.org/mands/FERMI/water/retellings.html. A retelling rubric for informational text can be found on Middle Web at http://www.middleweb.com/ReadWrkshp/RWdownld/RetellRubric_infotxt.pdf.

Resources:

Using Text Structure. The National Education Association presents a brief introduction to the concept of text structure with suggestions of strategies for teaching about it.
http://www.nea.org/reading/usingtextstructure.html

Using Expository Text Structure to Enhance Comprehension. This is a comprehensive introduction to online text structure web sites that review recent research and show how teachers are using direct instruction in expository text patterns for the kind of reading students encounter in all subject areas.
http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/reading/68477

Text Structure. This web site offers a concise introduction to different types of text structures and signal words. It also suggests questions for each structure and includes diagrams and sample teacher materials.
http://www.somers.k12.ny.us/intranet/reading/questions.html

Reader and Text. This site offers an introduction to text structure with a mini-tutorial for students. It includes sample texts and different strategies for organizing them, such as signal words and mapping.
http://www.info.kochi-tech.ac.jp/lawrie/semanticmapindex.htm

Understanding Text Implementation Guide. This site provides an introductory lesson to the concept of text structure and includes sample social studies texts and questions.
http://go.hrw.com/secure/ss/general/strategies/STRAT02U.PDF

Reading Trail. Focusing on text structure, this site provides a series of lessons with sample readings about climbing Mt. Everest.
http://www.everestquest.com/reading.htm

Strengthening Reading and Writing Skills Using the Internet. Scholastic offers a series of lessons focusing on different text organizing strategies, e.g., sequencing, compare-contrast.
http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/teachtech/internetreadwrite.htm

The Textmapping Project. This site describes the benefits of textmapping, which is an alternative type of graphic organizer that involves the text being reproduced in scroll fashion and a spatially descriptive form of marking text.
http://www.textmapping.org/index.html

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory - Graphic organizers. This web site offers many different graphic organizers that can be used with various text structures.
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1grorg.htm

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