

Book Study

Prepared by the
Kansas Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) Project

Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction

Oliver Keene Ellin and Susan Zimmerman
(Heinemann, 2007)

Book Description

Mosaic of Thought (2nd edition) is an excellent book that focuses on explicitly describing the use and benefits of strategy-based comprehension instruction. It provides key ideas for each strategy and describes critical comprehension concepts. It is full of classroom examples, both primary and intermediate, that demonstrate the strategy instruction in application. The information, research and practical application provided by the authors is an insightful guide for comprehension instruction in a multi tiered system of support.

Target Audience

K-6 Tier 1 teachers or interventionists working with groups on comprehension.

Chapter 1: Creating a New Mosaic

Overview:

This chapter looks at the evolution of comprehension strategy instruction as the authors look back at the experiences they have had working with teachers around the country. The authors discuss lessons they have learned. The book tackles the question of how to help students become more aware of their own reading processes and ways to help them improve their comprehension.

Helpful Hints:

It might be beneficial for the first day of the book study to recap the comprehension strategies discussed in the book. It will be important for the participants to think about and discuss how they use these strategies in their own reading experiences. The poems on page 2 and 3 are a good way to lead this discussion.

Discussion Questions:

1. Reflect back on your own learning experiences and discuss how you learned to comprehend text. How does this experience help you in teaching children to use all of the strategies effectively?
2. Why is it important for us as teachers to understand and be aware of how we comprehend reading before we are able to teach our students to do so?
3. Comprehension strategy instruction should be built on a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction. Discuss your thoughts on how scaffolding instruction works into a Multi Tier System of Support.
4. How does our core instruction in reading address the metacognitive strategies of comprehension?
5. Is there an area of comprehension that needs to be strengthened in our core curriculum?
6. How do you address the needs of students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 differently with comprehension instruction?
7. What role does reading workshop have in our school?
8. How does understanding the reading process help students to increase their use of metacognitive strategies to strengthen their comprehension?

Chapter 2: Changing Times

Overview:

This chapter compares traditional practices of teaching comprehension with today's practices of comprehension instruction. It explains the need to actively engage kids in thoughtful reading, writing and discussion to foster their thinking and comprehension skills. Due to the increased pressure of state testing procedures, the question is posed as to whether the joy of reading can be upheld throughout reading instruction. The chapter ends with a helpful question and answer format.

Helpful Hints:

Prior to reading this chapter, it would be beneficial to use the questions presented as discussion starters to have teachers share their own thoughts on each topic. This would engage their prior knowledge of the importance of comprehension instruction. They could use a "t chart" format to write their thoughts prior to reading and then after reading.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the students in our school view reading? Use this question to discuss the students' perspective of our reading program.
2. What do we have in place in our school to foster the love of reading in students? Have we created an environment where students are deeply engaged and passionate for their own learning?
3. Where in our schedule can we build in times throughout the day to instruct, think aloud, model and demonstrate how proficient readers comprehend more deeply?
4. How does the order of strategy instruction presented in the chapter match our core curriculum?
5. How do we currently meet the needs of students who do not comprehend well?
6. How much time do we allow students to actually read and talk throughout the day?
7. How do we combine these comprehension strategies and techniques with teaching our state indicators?

Chapter 3: Mindful Reading: Monitoring and Revising Comprehension

Overview:

This chapter looks at the importance of teaching children to monitor and adjust their comprehension as they are reading. In many ways, monitoring is the umbrella under which the other comprehension strategies fall. It is important to emphasize being metacognitive, paying attention to our understanding as we read to know whether we comprehend the story. Comprehension issues can be connected to surface structures, the visible aspects of the text, or to deep structure of the text such as meanings, concepts and background knowledge.

Helpful Hints:

This chapter can be a great tool for discussion around the difficulties of getting children to be metacognitive, aware of their thinking as they read. The discussion can be used to make sure there is a common language of comprehension strategies throughout the grade levels. The classroom examples can be used to show how students use the tools of comprehension to monitor and adjust their thinking as they read and what the teacher's role is in that process.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do we present the strategy of monitoring comprehension through our core curriculum?
2. How does this strategy affect our Tier 2 and Tier 3 readers?
3. Do we have a common language that we are using throughout our grade levels to help the students to be metacognitive?
4. How important is it for the teacher to model the use of monitoring comprehension strategies while he/she reads aloud to the students?
5. Can our students articulate the strategies that will help them to comprehend text?

Chapter 4: The Present of the Past: Using Schema to Understand and Remember

Overview:

Chapter 4 discusses research that supports using schema as a strong strategy to develop further comprehension. Schema is the way students connect the new to the known, recall relevant information, and further their comprehension with prior knowledge. Researchers have shown that students will understand what they are reading better if they think about their own experiences as they read.

Helpful Hints:

Use the excerpt from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as a discussion starter for the chapter. Where did this passage take your thoughts? Discuss how important our personal connections are to what we read and how powerful our background knowledge is in affecting how we respond and understand text.

Discussion Questions:

1. What role does activating prior knowledge have in students' success as readers?
2. How does our core curriculum support the importance of schema before, during and after reading?
3. How do we support our students that have little background knowledge in areas we are reading about?
4. Is there a difference in how we get students to make connections to prior knowledge in nonfiction reading? Do we need to increase the amount of support in using schema in content area reading?
5. How does using schema affect our Tier 2 and Tier 3 readers? What kind of support do we have in place for assisting students in making connections to increase their comprehension?
6. What is your understanding of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model? How does this model fit into your daily plans with students?
7. The classroom examples in this chapter demonstrate how teachers explicitly teach one strategy, in depth, at a time. What are your reactions to and thoughts about this

method of comprehension instruction? What do you think would be the benefits and do you think there are any drawbacks?

8. How can we select texts for think-alouds so that we can use this strategy effectively?

Chapter 5: The Art of Discovery: Questioning

Overview:

This chapter discusses the importance of questioning as we read. Questioning the content, style and intent of the text helps readers to be active in their thinking process as they read. The chapter also discusses the use of crafting sessions to support the concept of questioning. Reading conferences and small group instruction are important to help children focus on applying the strategy in their own reading. This chapter also discusses the use of invitational groups to meet the needs of struggling readers.

Helpful Hints:

It may be helpful to discuss research about questioning prior to reading this chapter. This chapter also discusses the use of the Major Point Interview for Readers (Updated as *Assessing Comprehension Thinking Strategies*, Keene 2006) to identify a students' present use of questioning. It may be helpful to have that resource available to staff to use and discuss while reading this chapter.

Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss this quotation from Susan's reflection on page 105- "For me, questions are the glue of engagement." What are your thoughts about the role of questions in engaging students in learning?
2. How necessary is teacher modeling and the active teaching of metacognition to help students slow down and become involved enough in the text to become active readers?
3. How do we teach students to be aware of their questions or "I wonders" that they have?
4. How does our basal allow for questioning? Do we rely on the questions that are provided by the basal or do we allow students to generate their own questions?
5. How can we help our students generate questions that will help them increase their understanding of the text?

6. How do invitational groups compare to Tier 2 groups? Do we use them both for needs-based groups that meet for a specific instructional purpose?

7. What role does scaffolding instruction have in both Tier groups and invitational groups?

Chapter 6: Creating Meaning: Inference

Overview:

This chapter focuses on the process of inferring to create a personal and unique meaning from text. A proficient reader creates meaning that is neither stated explicitly in the text or is shown in the illustrations. The chapter also discusses the use of think-alouds, modeling and demonstrations in day –to- day comprehension instruction. The chapter concludes with key ideas on conferring with students to help a child focus on a specific skill or strategy.

Helpful Hints:

Teaching inference is sometimes difficult for teachers. It would be beneficial for the participants of the book study to look further into the strategy of using think- alouds. The examples of a more highly developed think-aloud lesson can be used as a springboard in evaluating their own use of the strategy. It may be helpful to create a “script” together of a book to identify how to strengthen the use of a think-aloud.

Discussion Questions:

1. What insights do you have about inferring now that you have read this chapter?
2. How does inferring help a reader?
3. Inferences are based in part on individual life experience and knowledge of the reader. How does our core curriculum allow for inferring within the text? How does this fit into standardized tests or state assessments?
4. How does the use of think-alouds help our students to increase their inferring skills?
5. How do we support our Tier 2 and Tier 3 readers with higher level thinking like inferring?
6. How can we describe inferring to kids? What language can we use to help them to understand the process of inferring? Look back at the classroom examples and search for language that they used that was helpful. (“pay attention to the voice inside your mind and listen to any inferences you may have”)

7. What role does conferring play in our reading block time? How can we implement conferences with individual students to understand each child's current use of skills and strategies to help to direct our instruction?

Chapter 7: Bringing Text to Life: Using Sensory and Emotional Images to Enhance Comprehension

Overview:

Creating images while we read allows us to bring the text to life. Images originate in our senses and combine with our emotions. The images that we create while we read have little meaning unless we associate it with words on the page along with other images and memories of our lives. Students need explicit instruction to develop their image-making abilities. They need to understand how their images help them to better comprehend what they read.

Helpful Hints:

Use the short story on page 170 as the discussion starter. Prior to reading the rest of the chapter, have staff share what they envisioned in their mind as they read the selection. Discuss the analogy of sensory and emotional images as a kind of Impressionism of the mind.

Discussion Questions:

1. The chapter discusses how this strategy can be the conduit to student engagement. Discuss how you think we can use the creating images strategy to help our struggling readers.
2. Using think- alouds to describe what you see, smell, taste, touch, and feel as you read is a great way to teach students to develop their image-making abilities. What stories/text/passages do you use that allow for a think-aloud process?
3. How inter-related do you see this strategy with schema and making text connections? What do you think about the idea that as we teach one strategy, in depth, students will begin to implement some of the other strategies as well?
4. How do you envision implementing this strategy with your Tier 2 and Tier 3 readers?
5. This chapter discusses the use of composing sessions. Does our core reading block allow for time to have students compose their thoughts/reactions to what they read?
6. In the intermediate classroom example, Todd decided to create four “capturing thinking” areas that students could use throughout all of the strategy studies. Discuss how you feel this could meet the needs of our learners. How do we allow our students to express and explore the meaning of books?

7. Does our basal instruction allow students to focus only on literal meanings or interpretations of text? Discuss your thoughts.

Chapter 8: The Heart of the Matter: Determining Importance

Overview:

Determining importance is vital in the world today as we are inundated with an excessive amount of available information. Students need to learn to read critically so that they can separate the essential information from the nonessential.

Helpful Hints:

It may be helpful to have each person use a sample of grade appropriate nonfiction text to discuss the ideas they identify as important. The discussion can include what their thinking process is behind the decision of what is important.

Discussion Questions:

1. Some readers have a difficult time determining the importance of what they read. Discuss how you see this in your classroom. What do you think is leading to this difficulty?
2. In the intermediate classroom example, Ellen talked with Jeremy about listening to the voice inside his head that told him when something was important. How do you think using the highlighter helped Jeremy focus on this process?
3. Readers use at least three levels (whole-text, sentence level, and word level) to make decisions about what is most important in the text. Discuss each level. What level do you feel our students rely on the most?
4. How can we change our instruction to make it easier for our students to determine what is important in a text?
5. Does our state assessment guide our instruction in teaching students to identify **the** main idea? How can we make students understand that for testing purposes they need to concentrate on the one most important idea but in most reading situations they will understand a number of key ideas?
6. What did you find most interesting as you read this chapter?

7. How does our instruction on determining importance need to change for our struggling readers?

Chapter 9: The Evolution of Meaning: Synthesis

Overview:

Synthesis takes place during and after reading. It is a way of creating a mental plan of understanding for what you are reading, experiencing or learning and revising that plan as we recall or encounter new information. When students are synthesizing they are thinking about what the text really means to them.

Helpful Hints:

This chapter allows for a good discussion centered on the differences between summarizing and synthesizing. It presents a nice opportunity to discuss higher order thinking skills.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you see as the major differences between summarizing and synthesizing? How would you define each?
2. What key skills do we need to develop in our students in order for them to be successful in synthesizing a text?
3. How does our core curriculum emphasize summarizing and synthesizing?
4. How can we teach our struggling readers to evaluate the meaning of the text?
5. Discuss Riley's metaphor of what synthesis is on pages 233-234. Do you think our students could relate to this metaphor?
6. How important do you think teacher modeling is to this strategy?