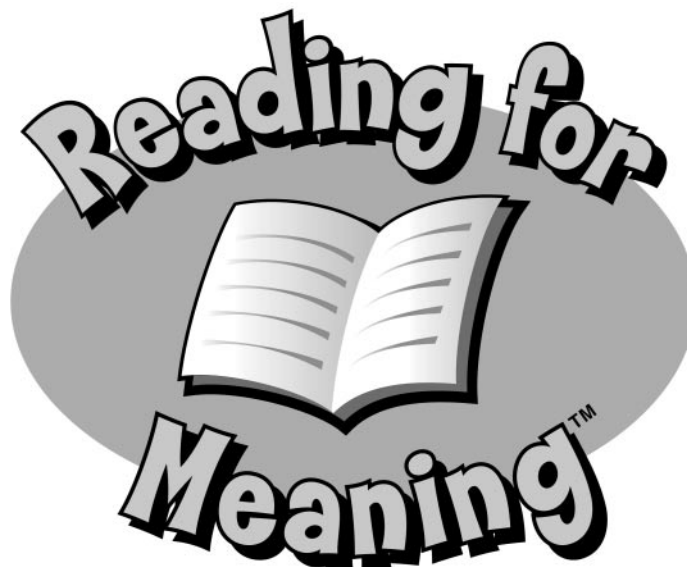




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**A Research-Based Approach to
Reading Comprehension Instruction**



Reading for Meaning: A Research-Based Approach to Reading Comprehension Instruction

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Reading for Meaning: A Research-Based Approach to Reading Comprehension Instruction

The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, dubbed “No Child Left Behind,” reaffirms our nation’s commitment to quality education for all students. The legislation, which focuses particularly on reading, calls for schools to seek out and use research-validated instructional methods to ensure student learning. To meet this challenge, schools must select instructional materials that have a proven track record of success or are based on instructional methods that have been proven to raise student achievement. This paper describes how *Reading for Meaning*, a reading comprehension software program published by Tom Snyder Productions, reflects the research base and fills a critical gap in reading instruction.

Need for Comprehension Instruction

Much of the research underlying the No Child Left Behind Act comes from the extensive work of the National Reading Panel (NRP). The NRP report, “*Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*” (2000), summarized and synthesized research on reading over the last thirty-plus years. The Panel used the highest standards of scientific research to filter the studies it reviewed. The NRP findings highlight important areas of instructional need and delineate research-backed methods for meeting those needs.

One particular area of need articulated in the NRP review is in the area of comprehension instruction. The NRP concluded that explicit instruction in cognitive strategies is absolutely necessary to improve students’ reading comprehension. *Palinscar and Brown (1984)* determined that improvement occurs when teachers demonstrate, explain, model, and guide interaction with students as they move through the text. In fact, the NRP determined, “readers who are not explicitly taught these procedures are unlikely to learn, develop, or use them spontaneously” (p 4–40). Thus, students’ comprehension strategies can improve, but only with explicit instruction, modeling, and scaffolding.

Unfortunately, many students have not been receiving the comprehension instruction they need. Studies by *Durkin (1979)*, *Duffy, Lanier, and Roehler (1980)* and *Pressley (1998)* have shown that only a small percentage of instructional time is devoted to teaching reading comprehension. The studies showed that teachers spent most of their time assigning activities, monitoring students to be on-task, directing recitation sessions, and providing corrective feedback when students made mistakes. Teachers spent little time teaching and demonstrating the skills, strategies, and processes that students could use to help them comprehend information in text. This need for comprehension instruction is echoed by a RAND report entitled “*Reading for Understanding: Toward a Research and Development Program in Reading Comprehension*” (2002). This report concluded that “teachers must teach comprehension explicitly, beginning in the primary grades and continuing through high school” (p. xii).

Comprehension does not emerge on its own. Schools need to teach text comprehension skills explicitly, and they must employ methods validated by research. The tables on the following pages describe that research and how *Reading for Meaning*, a program designed specifically to improve reading comprehension, incorporates proven techniques to meet the needs of today’s students and teachers.

Explicit and Integrated Skill Instruction for Reading Comprehension

The Research

The NRP Report calls for the explicit teaching of the comprehension skills and strategies (such as summarization, question and answering, and identifying the main idea) that good readers have internalized and employ without conscious effort. Both struggling and accomplished readers need to build a repertoire of comprehension strategies that they can call on when attacking new text. All students benefit from learning and practicing these skills discretely. However, research by Judith Langer, from the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement, suggests that teaching these skills solely in isolation limits their value (*Langer, 2000*). Langer found that in the most successful classrooms, teachers first modeled the comprehension skills, simulating what the students should be doing in their own reading. Teachers then gave students opportunities to practice the skills as an integrated part of their regular reading and core literature lessons. Students could then clearly see and employ these skills within the context of their normal reading experiences.

Reading for Meaning

Reading for Meaning follows this proven instructional approach of teacher modeling coupled with integrated practice. The program contains five modeling lessons and thirty practice lessons focusing on the reading comprehension skills of main idea, inference, compare and contrast, cause and effect, and sequence. The program follows a gradual release model that moves students toward independent mastery in a supported and scaffolded environment. *Reading for Meaning* helps the teacher model the skill for the class, and it then offers multiple opportunities for integrating that skill into existing reading and literature assignments. The program includes passages from core literature for guided practice using graphic organizers. Finally, the tools and process provided by the program can be integrated into any independent reading done by individual students. Rather than a separate exercise, comprehension instruction with *Reading for Meaning* becomes a part of the overall reading program.

Graphic Organizers and Reading Comprehension

The Research

The NRP review of research found graphic organizers to be helpful tools in improving reading comprehension. Essentially, a graphic organizer is a graph, such as an idea web, Venn diagram, or box map, that is used to organize ideas and relationships. Deconstructing the text using such a semantic mapping system helps students identify the most important information in the text and remember its content. To be successful, however, the type of organizer must be carefully considered, and used in the context of a specific instructional strategy (Merkley & Jeffries, 2001).

Reading for Meaning

Reading for Meaning gives students instruction and practice in using graphic organizers specifically designed to match instructional goals and comprehension strategies. For example, prior to reading a selection from “Call of the Wild,” the software prompts students to consider what is the topic and main idea of the passage. This type of guiding question helps to focus the students on a purpose for their reading while modeling a strategy that strong readers frequently use. After reading the passage, students work in groups to complete an idea web to help them visually represent the content of the text. Similarly, in a sequencing lesson, the graphic organizer is explicitly designed to help students organize the chronology of events. Compare and contrast lessons use a Venn diagram, and so on. Each electronic organizer in *Reading for Meaning* is tailor-made for the corresponding instructional plan.

Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

The Research

The NRP Report affirmed what conventional wisdom and research have long purported: vocabulary and reading comprehension are inextricably linked. A child can't understand text without knowing what the words mean. And research shows that most word acquisition takes place indirectly, "through everyday experiences with oral and written language" (CIERA, 2001). According to the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, indirect vocabulary learning can be enhanced in three ways: a) engage children in rich oral language experiences; b) read aloud and discuss what is read; and c) encourage students to read on their own. A growing vocabulary helps students more readily comprehend increasingly advanced and varied texts.

Reading for Meaning

The *Reading for Meaning* process engages students in rich and meaningful oral language experiences that help reinforce vocabulary learning. The program offers audio recordings of authentic literature passages, paired with printed and on-screen text. After listening to and reading a passage, students then participate in a directed discussion about the meaning of the text. The teacher's ability to guide discussions and review student work provides multiple opportunities for clarification of word meaning. Finally, the extensive lesson library encourages thoughtful independent reading that reaches far beyond the program. Students receive repeated and supported exposure to vocabulary across literary genres and reading levels.

Summary

Reading for Meaning incorporates these research-based instructional approaches in a technology-driven format. While the research on technology and reading instruction remains in its early stages, the NRP Report did find positive results in the studies it reviewed (p. 17). The computer's ability to manipulate electronic text and represent it in multiple formats holds great promise for matching instruction to specific learner needs. *Reading for Meaning* capitalizes on many of the advantages of computer technology to support validated methods for teaching reading comprehension. The scaffolded sequence of instruction, the flexibility of the graphic organizers, the multimedia modeling lessons, and the ability easily to shift among reading levels and genres all leverage the power of technology in support of proven practice.

For students to succeed in school, and in life, they need to be able to read and to understand what they read. Research has highlighted the striking void in comprehension instruction, and it has defined the characteristics of successful teaching practice. *Reading for Meaning* fills this instructional gap with research-based methodologies that have been proven to work in the classroom. The program offers explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, teacher modeling and guided practice, the integration of graphic organizers, support for vocabulary development, and the innovative and powerful use of computer technology. In addition, *Reading for Meaning's* easy-to-use format, clear lesson outlines, and step-by-step directions help scaffold the teacher in integrating these proven instructional techniques into his/her teaching, while also scaffolding the students in their learning. *Reading for Meaning* can reach into every classroom, helping teachers develop successful, lifelong readers.

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Tom Snyder Productions

Tom Snyder Productions, a Scholastic company, is a leading developer and publisher of educational software for K–12 classrooms. The company was founded over 20 years ago by Tom Snyder, a former science and music teacher, who pioneered the utilization of technology in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. Today we are proud to carry over 100 award-winning software titles covering each curriculum area, developed with strict adherence to our high standards for quality and innovation. Our products help teachers meet curriculum goals in over 375,000 classrooms, improving student performance and understanding.

Our mission is to create innovative products and services to inspire great teaching and improve student learning.



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