

METACOGNITION

Strategic readers know what they know and they know what is working for them. They are aware of their own learning. These students can “stand back” and view in their mind the process of the specific task at hand. It is as if they have a “rewind button” that enables them to review the process of learning. When they perceive that the reading about hurricanes, for example, does not make sense to them or the ideas are unclear, they stop and take action. Struggling readers and even some achieving students are not aware when they do not understand.... they keep on “saying the words” without understanding the meaning of those words.

RESEARCH

Metacognition is knowing about knowing. The theory was first developed in the 1970s. (Favell, 1977). The knowledge about how one’s “knowing” is progressing can help one retain more and inform a student how to proceed when confronted with text containing ideas that must be remembered. (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). Metacognition increases the likelihood of long-term, appropriate use of strategies. (Pressley, Borkowski, & O’Sullivan, 1984, 1985). The use of strategies to assist in organizing and retaining information found in text was an outgrowth of the discovery that being metacognitive greatly assisted learning. Although strategies were teachable, it was found that they became a part of long-term use when students had information about the usefulness of the strategy and that was included in instruction. (Pressley, et al, 1982)

Pressley defines metacognition:

Metacognition is knowledge of thinking processes, both knowledge of the thinking occurring in the here and now (“I am really struggling to figure out how to write this introduction; I believe that the introduction I have just written makes sense”) and in the long term (“I know a number of specific strategies for planning a composition, rough drafting it, and revising the draft”). In the case of reading, the most important hear-and-now metacognition is awareness of whether a text is being understood (or conversely, awareness of when text is not being understood and probably will not be remembered). Long-term metacognition in reading includes knowledge of comprehension strategies. This can begin during direct teacher explanations and modeling of strategies, but develops most completely when students practice using comprehension strategies as they read. It seems especially helpful if such practice includes opportunities to explain one’s strategies use and reflect on the use of strategies over the course of semesters of schooling. The internalization of comprehension strategies involves long-term practice with the strategies, including opportunities to reflect on strategies use with others.

The metacognitively sophisticated teacher knows that:

Metacognition and comprehension skills do not develop very well on its own.

Strategies used by good comprehenders can be taught with explanation and modeling.

Scaffolding of guided practice can result in independent student use of Metacognition.

It is important for all strategy use to be given in the context of read, read, read.

Comprehension and use of metacognition depends upon extensive reading and development of background knowledge.