
PROFESSIONAL READING GUIDE

Building Comprehension Strategies by Dr Alison Davis, 2011, Eleanor Curtain Publishing: Melbourne

This Professional Reading Guide provides support for literacy leaders and teachers using the text “Building Comprehension Strategies” to support school wide professional development and implementation of effective and evidence based reading comprehension instruction.

The guide provides discussion points and key questions to inquire further in to the key ideas, pedagogical content and practice suggestions included in each of the ten chapters in this text.

A teacher reflective learning log is also provided for use as part of the professional learning process.

About the book

This text examines and explores the comprehension strategies skilled readers actively use to make meaning before, during and after reading. The text provides literacy leaders and classroom teachers with opportunities to explore, in depth, eight of comprehension strategies critical to reading success.

These strategies are: making connections to prior knowledge, prediction and re-prediction, visualisation, asking and answering questions, inference, retell, paraphrasing and summarisation.

Each chapter provides a detailed overview and explanation of each strategy, example of learning goals and success criteria and a wide range of teacher and student questions for applying each strategy. Additionally each chapter also provides in depth examples of classroom instruction in using and applying each strategy, examples of think aloud practices along with a range of learning tasks, graphic organisers and self and peer assessment schedules in relation to strategy use.

The text is accompanied by a CDROM with containing blackline masters and graphic organisers that can be used for independent, pair and small group work during instruction.

How to use this professional reading resource?

This resource is designed to support teachers to understand and use the key ideas suggested by Dr Alison Davis in her 2011 text *‘Building Comprehension Strategies’*.

This resource provides twelve distinct Professional learning and development workshop suggestions to be used for in school professional development. It is expected that schools will likely focus on one chapter each session, covering the main ideas and teaching approaches outlined in each chapter over a period of time. *For example one session every 3-4 weeks throughout a year; one session every fortnight for two terms* After each session it is suggested that teachers implement, reflect on and report back on instructional practices and key ideas related to the session.

Preparation for each Professional learning and development session

Inquiry

This resource provides a range of inquiry questions and tasks for each of the chapters in this text.

Several days before each session teachers should be given these inquiry questions. These questions are for their own personal reflection and teachers should reflect on these questions in preparation for the workshop for their own personal reflection.

Inquiry questions are provided in blue throughout the resource and are based on the concept of professional development based on inquiry in to the needs of students and the needs of teachers (refer Timperley et.al, 2007; Ministry of Education TKI website – assessment on line and literacy on line)

Pre-reading

Literacy leaders and teachers should read each chapter prior to each session.

What to bring to each session?

- Individual copies of ‘Building Comprehension Strategies’
- A designated text – either one of their own choice or one determined by the literacy leader. This text should be relevant to the age and learning needs of the students teachers have in their classes.
- Personal reflections from the inquiry questions
- Teachers’ own professional learning log. Entries should be completed at the end of each PLD session.

Using inquiry as the basis for professional learning and development

Teacher practice, pedagogy and professional learning as inquiry



Continual inquiry in to the impact of change. On-gong explicit discussion of the challenges faced.

This diagram is adapted from the Best Evidence Synthesis on Professional Development (MOE, 2007). See also teaching as Inquiry on the TKI website

Using this diagram as a basis for inquiry:

What knowledge and skills do our students need?

What knowledge and skills do us as teachers and leaders need?

leaders and teachers can unpack the key ideas in '*Building Comprehension Strategies*' in relation to the needs of their students, their own knowledge and skills, the development of new learning experiences through action, practice and review

Text Introduction

Page1

Preparation

Paper and pens to record key questions and key ideas

In “Building Comprehension Strategies” Alison identifies a range of comprehension strategies for teaching and improving the reading comprehension achievement of your students.

Consider:

What do you know about comprehension strategies?

What are the comprehension strategy needs of your students?

How do you currently teach these strategies?

What do your students know about when and how to use each of these strategies?

How do you currently monitor your students’ progress and achievement?

Make a list of key questions you would like to find out more about

You may consider

How can I support my students to become more active readers?

How can I better provide learning opportunities through which my students develop confidence and competence to describe and explain the comprehension strategies they use to assist them to gain meaning, when they use these and how using these strategies helps them to develop as active and self-regulated readers?

Chapter 1: Effective Reading Comprehension Practices

Pages 3-18

Inquiry

How metacognitively active are my students? What do they know about the cognitive metacognitive strategies used by skilled readers? What do I understand metacognition to involve? What do I know about important metacognitive teaching approaches?

Preparation

Complete Pre-reading task

Paper and Pens

Prepared headings – Before reading we thought – As we read we also learned

Pre-reading task

List the key characteristics of effective reading comprehension instruction as relates directly to your existing reading comprehension programme.

As you read and discuss this chapter add to your list

- a. Adding to those aspects you have already identified
- b. Adding additional aspects

Unpacking the key ideas in the text

The section below explores each of the three key ideas within chapter 1. These are

- comprehension strategies
- metacognitive comprehension instruction
- deliberately teaching text structure

Comprehension strategies

Alison refers to comprehension strategies as ‘tools to assist learning’ and ‘conscious plans and activities to help students develop and control their understanding of text’ (page 5). What do you understand this to mean? How can you make this explicit through your instruction? What does this mean in relation to instruction that focuses on the skills, strategies and knowledge of skilled readers? (Page 5-6).

Metacognitive comprehension instruction

What are the critical elements of metacognitive strategy instruction?

Where does the talk aloud and think aloud approach align within metacognitive instruction?

How does the planned and consistent use of formative assessment sit within metacognitive instruction?

What is the role of questioning and what do we need to consider when we ask questions of our students?

Draw and label a diagram to show what you understand the key elements of metacognitive comprehension instruction to be. Explain your diagram to a peer.

As a staff decide the key criteria for metacognitively rich comprehension instruction.

Deliberately teaching text structure

On pages 16-18 Alison poses an argument for deliberate inclusion of text structure (also known as story grammar) within a reading comprehension programme. She argues that student knowledge of text structure – the language features, text organization and associated vocabulary choices – prepares them to comprehend and self monitor their reading.

Why do you think this is the case?

How do you address this within your existing reading programme?

What additional practices would strengthen this – before, during and after reading?

Concluding discussion

What are the key ideas in this chapter?

What are the implications for school wide practice?

What are the implications for classroom instruction?

Chapter 2: Reading comprehension teaching approaches

Pages 19-36

Inquiry

What information do I currently have about the learning needs of my students? How do I use information to inform the content, pace and approach of my day to day instruction?

Preparation

Bring student achievement information for a group of students to this workshop

In this chapter Alison summarises a range of ways teachers can gather, analyse and use assessment information to make decisions that will inform the nature and content of instruction (pages 19-22).

Discussion

Consider the assessment information you currently use and how you analyse and make use of data gathering through planned and recorded teacher observation, through teacher-student feedback and through specifically designed assessments that provide you with specific information on an aspect of student learning.

Discuss the key questions a teacher might ask when analyzing data. Consider – what information would each of these questions provide that could help me in making decisions about instructional approach and instructional content?

Task

Work with other teachers who take a similar year group of students. Using information about your student's achievement decide an aspect of student learning you specifically want to find out more about. Design two different methods of gathering information – eg a student interview and a teacher observation of students as they complete a task OR a marking criteria for a set task and a student feedback sheet OR a pre assessment task and a post assessment task

When you have designed these tasks present to the rest of your teaching team. Share the rationale for the design, the area of inquiry you have designed the task to find out more about and how the assessment will be used to inform future instruction.

Teaching approaches

In this section of chapter 2 Alison describes a range of teaching approaches for instructional reading. She describes six approaches for group instruction. Identify and discuss the main characteristics of each of these approaches and how each fit with group based instruction.

Consider other approaches not included in this chapter (refer also Davis, 2007 as required) and where they also fit in to a balanced teaching programme. In particular consider the use of reciprocal reading, choral reading, reader's theatre and Questioning the Author that Alison describes in this earlier text.

Reflect

How do we, as a team of teachers, make decisions about the best mix of teaching approaches for our students? How does this change throughout the course of a year?

Chapter 3: Making Connections to Prior Knowledge

Pages 37-50

Inquiry

What do I know about the prior knowledge and experiences of my students in relation to:

- The content of texts they are required to read
- The structure of texts they are required to read
- The vocabulary they will encounter in these texts

How am I deliberately scaffolding my instruction to explore and build on the cultural and language knowledge and experiences my students bring to their reading lessons?

What are my own professional needs in respect to supporting my students to make connections to their prior knowledge and experiences BEFORE, DURING and AFTER reading instruction?

In chapter 3 Alison identifies four areas of prior knowledge students bring to each reading lesson.

Preparation

Read this chapter.

Consider

How can we find out about our students knowledge and experiences before we plan and implement reading instruction? How can we best scaffold students to make connections before, during and after reading instruction? What might we need to do differently? Is this different when reading fiction and non-fiction text?

Task

Based on a text you will be reading with a group of your students - take one of the learning tasks and one of the graphic organisers used in this chapter to exemplify the importance of deliberate instruction of the Making Connections strategy. Consider how these tasks might be incorporated within your instruction. Consider also modifications you may need to make to the exemplars provided in this text to best meet the needs of your own students.

Discuss

What is the role of formative assessment in supporting students to understand the importance of the Making Connections strategy? What can teachers do to make this explicit? What can students do to assist and improve comprehension of the texts they are reading?

Chapter 4 – Prediction and Re-prediction

Pages 51-60

Inquiry – What do my students know about the Prediction and re-prediction strategy? How effectively do they use this strategy to help them comprehend what they are reading? How effectively do they use this strategy to self –regulate their understanding?

Preparation

Read this chapter

In this chapter Alison talks about this strategy using the terms ‘Predict and Re-predict’. She describes the importance of anticipating meaning, making calculated guesses, drawing on prior knowledge and using inferred information as integral to the strategy of prediction. She also highlights the importance of re-prediction as both part of this strategy, and as a form of self-regulating learning.

Discuss

Why do you think Alison has drawn our attention to these connections?

How would we know if our students are able to use this strategy? What would we see? What would we hear? What would they be able to demonstrate?

How can we extend our instruction of this strategy beyond a pre-reading strategy so that students learn to use the predict and re-predict strategy before AND during reading?

Task

Re-read the example of teacher think aloud on page 55 and the key questions for prediction and re-prediction on page 57.

Using a text you will use with a group of students prepare three examples of teacher think alouds that you can use to make explicit what you think and what occurs to you when you form predictions (refer also chapter 1 page 11 – The think-aloud approach)

Share and critique your examples with others in your group.

Consider - How can we scaffold students to develop confidence in using the think aloud approach as they learn about this strategy?

Discuss

What features of fiction and informational text assist students to form and alter or confirm their predictions.

Consider features such as headings, subheading, labels, captions, diagrams, sentence structure, vocabulary choices and illustrations. Make a list of text features to demonstrate and explain when you are teaching this strategy.

Chapter 5 – Visualisation

Pages 61-74

Inquiry

What is the visualisation strategy? What do my students know about when and how to use this strategy? What are the important considerations for me to think about when planning and implementing instruction on the use of this comprehension strategy?

Preparation

Chart paper and pens

One text for group work – your whole staff may use the same text or you may have different texts for different year groups

Read this chapter

Questions for discussion and reflection

Why do you think visualisation is an important strategy for students to be able to understand and use? How would you explain visualisation to your students? Record your groups' ideas on a chart for future reference.

What would you tell your students about the benefits of knowing and using the visualisation strategy? Record your groups' ideas on a chart for future reference.

Task

Refer to the learning tasks suggested on pages 68-71. Using the text you have brought with you to this session discuss how each of these tasks could be developed. As you do so consider and record other tasks that you might also use as part of instruction with your students.

Discuss

How has practicing using the visualisation strategy helped you to comprehend the text you are using? What are the implications of this for classroom instruction?

Consider how you might use the key questions in your own teaching.

Task

Select one of the five graphic organisers Alison has provided. Try to complete this task using the text you have brought with you to the session. Share and discuss what you did with others from your staff.

Chapter 6 – Asking and Answering Questions

Pages 75-87

Inquiry

How well are your students able to answer questions about text they have read? What kinds of questions do they find easy? What kinds of questions do they find more difficult?

How well are your students able to ask questions about text they have read? Are they able to ask a range of questions to support their understanding before, during and after reading?

How often do you explicitly teach your students to ask and answer questions? How do you model this comprehension strategy? How do you use talk aloud and think aloud to support your modeling and demonstration?

On page 75 Alison discusses the range of purposes students learn to ask and answer questions for. She also provides a range of reasons for asking and answering questions. Discuss – Why is asking and answering questions an important strategy for comprehension? Why is it important for students to not only answer questions, but to ask them too?

Read

Read the section on pages 76-78. Discuss the examples of strategy definition, explanation, learning goals and success criteria Alison has provided.

Consider

Why do you think it is important to make clear the strategy and how it is used to your students? Using Alison's example as a scaffold, develop an example you might share with your own students that is relevant to their age, learning needs and prior experience with this strategy.

Share and discuss your examples with others on your staff.

Refer to the self and peer assessment section on pages 84-85. Discuss how each of these could be used (or modified for use) in your own instruction. Prepare one or two additional examples that you could use in your teaching.

Chapter 7 – Inference

Pages 89-106

Inquiry

What are your students' strengths and needs with the inference strategy? How do you know?

What are your own strengths and needs in teaching inference?

List one professional goal for yourself to reach as a result of this chapter study and your inference instruction with a group of your students.

Read pages 89-90

Ask

How do you make an inference? What clues from the text do you use?

Record ideas and add to these as you read through the remainder of the chapter

As you read through the learning goals and success criteria and the examples of providing deliberate instruction consider how Alison describes a range of practices to explicitly assist students to know what the inference strategy is and how to use it.

Consider:

Why is it important for students to locate, describe and discuss the clues that lead them to infer?

What is the role of illustration, charts, diagrams and other visuals in leading to inference?

What is causal inference?

Explore the example of inference from sentences on page 98.

How can we support students to examine sentence clues as part of teaching inference?

Task

Using the text you have brought with you – find and discuss examples of inference from visual information and inferences from within individual and groups of sentences

Read

Read the section on teaching inference through re-reading.

Why do you think re-reading is an effective way of teaching inference? How else can re-reading support student understanding of the inference strategy?

Read the section on examining text structure to develop knowledge of inference. Why is text structure an important aspect of learning about inference?

On pages 100 and 101 Alison provides some examples where students are deliberately involved in tasks through which they share what they know about inference. Along with supporting students to use the talk aloud and think aloud approaches instructional examples such as these assist students to think about their own knowing and learning.

Discuss

How else can we incorporate activities such as these in our instructional reading programme?

Overview and discuss the various graphic organisers Alison has provided on pages 103 to 106 and discuss how these might be used during and after reading instruction.

Chapter 8: Retell and paraphrasing

Pages 107-110

Inquiry

How well can your students retell what they have read? How well can your students paraphrase what they have read? How do you know? Which students need additional support with this strategy? How might you provide this support?

Read pages 107-110.

Discuss

Why is retell an important strategy for all readers? What do skilled readers do when they retell information they have read?

Task

Working in pairs select a range of instructional examples from pages 111-116 to undertake using a text you have brought along to today's session.

Join with other pairs to share and discuss what you did.

Identify specific skills and knowledge that each of the tasks you completed would require of your students.

Consider the benefits of sharing these with students each time they complete the task and in particular, the benefit of this for students who are achieving below expected levels in reading comprehension.

Discuss

How can we make our instruction explicit and purposeful for these students?

Read the sections 118-120.

Discuss

How is retell and paraphrasing similar? What are the key differences in the two strategies? How can student knowledge and ability using both of these strategies improve their overall comprehension of fiction and non-fiction text?

Review

Review the graphic organisers provided on pages 120-121 and discuss what each of these requires a student to know and understand.

Conclude

Conclude this session with a discussion based on Alison's chapter summary. What does Alison encourage you to think about when you reflect on the importance of the comprehension strategies retell and paraphrase?

Chapter 9 – Summarisation

Pages 123-137

Inquiry

How well can my students summarise what they have read? Is this the same for fiction and non-fiction text? How do I know? What do I need to find out more about? What skills and understandings do I need to find out more about to better meet the learning needs of my students? What does effective summarisation instruction “look and feel like” in a metacognitively rich classroom reading programme?

Preparation

Select and read a text to be used for instructional reading with a group of students from within your class.

Read

Read pages 123-124

What are mental and written summaries?

What other strategies are integral to summarisation?

What are the implications of this for teaching and learning?

Read

Read and discuss the learning goals on page 124 – 126

Using these suggestions as a place to start develop learning goals and success criteria for a group of your own students – making sure to adapt these to the specific learning needs of your students. This group of students should be the group for whom you have brought along today’s text.

Share and critique your learning goals and success criteria with others providing a rationale for the goals and success criteria you have developed

Read and discuss

Read and discuss the examples of deliberate instruction and learning tasks on pages 126-133.

Think about the group of students you have planned your summarisation learning goals and success criteria for. Use the text you have brought with you develop a series of 3-4 activities you could take with this group of your own students. Note: The activities you plan must link to the learning goal and success criteria developed in the previous task

Review and develop

Review the self and peer assessments exemplified on pages 134-135

Develop a self and peer assessment to use with the group of students you have planned this instruction for.

Review the eight examples of graphic organisers that can be used to support practice of the summarisation strategy. Consider how you may use all or some of these in your instructional programme.

Chapter 10 - Multiple Strategy instruction

Pages 139-152

Inquiry

What comprehension strategies do my students most often use to support their understanding of text? What do they know about when and where to apply these strategies? How do I know? What do I know about combining strategies for instruction? When and how could I do this?

Any one particular strategy is not used in isolation - it is used in combination with a number of other strategies depending on the nature of the text, the content and the task. When instruction deliberately focuses on use of a range of strategies in combination with each other this is known as multiple-strategy instruction.

Read this chapter

Discuss

What are the key ideas Alison is developing with us?

What are the challenges Alison wants us to think about as we read this chapter and think about how we might combine specific strategies for instruction?

How can learning goals reflect the range of strategies students are learning to use?

Discuss the two approaches Alison has provided for multiple strategy instruction. How could you use or adapt these models?

Practice

Practice writing learning goals and success criteria for 2 examples of multiple strategy instruction that you will use with your students. Think of a range of ways you could present these through instruction. Share and discuss with others in your group.

Multiple strategy instruction also provides opportunities for students to practice past taught strategies in combination with each other.

Develop

Develop 2-3 possible graphic organisers or tasks students could use to practice strategies you have previously taught.

Review Session

Encourage teachers to share examples of how their reading comprehension instruction has developed through the year as a result of this professional development and learning

Do this through

Classroom walk-throughs – as a staff visit each classroom and allow each class teacher to share 2-3 things they have done throughout the period of this professional development. This also provides a great opportunity for teachers to view each other's classrooms and learn from the ideas of their colleagues.

Create a display of students work based on the teaching and learning instructional programme of a range of strategies. This could include examples of learning goals, reading text, reading tasks and follow up practice activities. House this display in a central place for teachers, students and parents to view – for example the entrance to the school office, in the school library or the school meeting room.

Take time to reflect on the entries of teacher professional learning logs and celebrate the learning journey that has been undertaken.