
Except from:

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COMPREHENDING/COMPREHENSION

I learned this activity from Cecilia, a young woman who teaches in Saudi Arabia. However, there are parts of this activity that remind me of an activity I learned from Roger Farr (Farr & Tone, 1994) several years ago. I suspect that this method has been adapted and adopted several times. I encourage teachers to use their knowledge to shape any method to fit the needs of the students.

Comprehending is a process; *comprehension* is a product. Good readers think about their reading while they are reading; good readers share their thoughts about reading; and good readers write about their reading. Most good readers go through this process of comprehending unconsciously. It is helpful to teach beginning readers some of the comprehending processes, which good readers do automatically. The purpose of this activity is to help readers learn (a) to predict and to share orally their thoughts, (b) to connect new knowledge with prior knowledge as they privately write their thoughts, and (c) to use any context clues in the text or any other thoughts that pop into their head while reading. It is the teacher's responsibility to preread the material and to make decisions about where in the text the readers will be asked to stop reading.

How to Do It

- Students are paired or placed in small groups. Each reader will also need a private journal or blank paper.
- The instructor decides on the three stopping places in the text before the activity.
- First, students read until the first predetermined stopping place in the text. In pairs, the students orally predict with their partner.
- Second, students read until the next stopping place. At this point, each reader connects her new knowledge with prior knowledge as they write privately in their journals. Each reader shares with her partner what she has written—if they choose to do so.
- Third, everyone reads until the last stopping place in the text. At this point, in pairs, the readers share their meaning making from context clues or any other thoughts that popped into their heads.

The Experience

My purpose for doing this with the teachers in Arizona was twofold. First, I wanted them to have an opportunity to experience various methods; second, I wanted to prepare the students for the problem posing that was to follow. Once again, I was using a method simply as a way of accessing text. For this purpose, I chose “Two Ways of Believing and Behaving” (see Figure 7.1 in Chapter 7) because I wanted students to think about their theoretical grounding.

Prediction is the first phase of the activity, and I was hoping that students in small, safe groups would predict some of their future actions on the basis of their individual belief structure.

Writing is the second phase of this activity, and I had chosen The Mess, detailed later in this chapter, because I wanted the students to write (and thus to think) about problem posing. The Mess is simply another way of problem posing (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2 later in this chapter). As the students shared their writing with their colleagues, I knew that they would hear differing perspectives and their understandings would grow.

Talking about context clues or anything else that popped into their heads is the final phase of this activity. As the students talked about other context clues and other things that popped into their heads, I remember them saying that they wanted to enter into problem posing. And so we did.