



Strengthening Reading Skills in Intermediate Classrooms

In inclusive, intermediate classrooms, how can teachers support all students to both improve their reading skills and engage with grade-level curricular content?



What I learned



Source

Learning

FPPL

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

- Literacy connects students to their classmates, to their teachers, and to the broader community when students can share, analyze and discuss what they've learned from reading texts.

Professional Standards for BC Educators

1. Educators value the success of all students. The ability to read is closely tied to student success in school and afterwards.
2. Educators understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development. Teaching literacy skills to intermediate students should respect their dignity and intelligence and therefore should not look the same as teaching primary students to read.
5. Educators implement effective planning, instruction, assessment and reporting practices to create respectful, inclusive environments for student learning and development. Teachers must (a) provide modes of engagement and assessment that are available to students who struggle with reading and (b) help all students to improve their reading fluency and comprehension.

BC Curricular Competencies

The BC Curricular Competencies require students to engage in advanced levels of thinking which requires much more than simply memorizing and repeating what they've read. Students need to be skilled at identifying main ideas in the texts they read in order to engage in these higher levels of thinking (Stark et al, 2025).

Academic Sources

Stark, K., Johnston, T., Shelton, A., Wexler, J. & Omohundro, K. (2025). Using response analysis to improve reading comprehension strategy instruction in middle school contexts. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 41(5), 447-460.

- When reading 100 word grade-level informational texts, only 23% of grade 6 students tested could identify both the subject of the text and the most important information about the subject.
- The researches considered any responses copied directly from the text to be non-answers (the equivalent of leaving the answer blank).

Burns, M.K., Duesenberg-Marshall, M.D. & Romero, M.E. (2024). Effects of a classwide reading interventions on reading fluency and comprehension of content area text with students in middle school. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 117(6), 378-386

- A class-wide reading intervention was conducted with grade 8 students in science and social studies classes. Students engaged in peer-supported reading and paragraph shrinking exercises for 20 min per day for 3 weeks.
- The intervention was found to increase both reading fluency and reading comprehension across all demographics.



How my thinking has changed



I used to think ...

Now I think ...

That the biggest challenge is teaching intermediate students who struggle with reading fluency.

That the biggest challenge is that the majority of intermediate students cannot extract key information from grade-level texts. Reading comprehension levels may be even lower in French Immersion classes where English speaking students read informational texts in French.

That reading skills must be taught in language classes.

That reading skills can be taught at the same time as teaching content.

That, when students copy answers from the text, they are learning something (although it would be better if they wrote the answers in their own words).

That copying an answer word-for-word from a text is considered by researchers to be a non-answer and therefore students should always write answers in their own words.
This has huge implications when considering the use of AI.

That most students in grades 6 and 7 are able to extract the main idea from written text.

That less than 1/3 of over the 500 grade 6 students studied could extract the main idea from a 100 word grade-level written text.



My Practicum Intentions

- I plan to incorporate the paragraph shrinking strategy studied by Burns et al (2024) in my science unit instead of asking students to answer short questions about the texts they read.
- Students will do a pre-and post-test of reading comprehension using grade level science text on a different topic (so that the post-test is about comprehending the text and not about what they learned in the unit).

My Journey

Through witnessing my children's school experiences, I got to see from a parent's perspective, what worked well and what could be improved. I believe that connection is the most important part of a child's school experience.
Other influences include my sister and cousin, who are both teachers, and my aunt who is a retired teacher: they have all been incredibly supportive on my journey.

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