

Preface

One of my biggest frustrations when I taught fifth grade was the inability to help those students who were unable to make sense of what they read. The basal reading series provided unit tests to measure comprehension, but the authors were strangely silent regarding what to do about those students who did poorly on the tests. When I encountered some of the same difficulties in my own reading of challenging textbooks and literature in high school and college, I developed some strategies to increase my comprehension and retention, but I had no theoretical background *or* practical framework for teaching them to students. My strategy instruction was haphazard and from my perspective largely ineffective.

After moving to a media center position, I taught my favorite strategies to upper-grade students in preparation for the traditional “research” and report-writing unit and came to believe that if all teachers embedded these lessons into their daily instruction, students would eventually use them independently. They would acquire the habits of the mind that are needed to understand and retain what is read. But my colleagues were not buying what I was selling. They were already overloaded with mandates and curriculum binders.

I became an elementary school principal in 1983, about the same time that a new body of research became available. It described some of the key cognitive strategies that highly skilled readers routinely use and explained how to teach them to students.¹ As my faculty and I explored ways to increase literacy levels in a low-performing school, we dipped our toes into the unfamiliar waters of schoolwide (K–6) strategy instruction. Our experimentation with strategy instruction (as well as a variety of other reading initiatives) was associated with rising achievement (McEwan, 1998).

Our instructional resources were limited to a few journal articles and simple handouts developed by our county reading specialist. Today there are multiple options for educators desiring to implement cognitive strategy instruction. Many of the books contain appealing instructional activities with catchy titles, samples of student work, and colorful photos of happy students and confident teachers. But most do not give their readers the “big picture” of cognitive strategy instruction—the relevant scientific research and the critical elements, particularly the need for explicit instruction. In my opinion, they fall short of preparing teachers for the challenges that confront anyone desiring to implement what I call *strategic reading instruction (SRI)*.

In addition to the popular strategy books, there is also a second option for those who want to implement strategy instruction—a group of edited

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academic volumes containing articles written by some of the most eminent cognitive psychologists and reading scholars.² These books explain the theory, summarize the current research, and offer research agendas for the future—all extremely important topics in these days of accountability, but they are challenging to read and provide few, if any, ready-to-use instructional activities.

Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers: Using Cognitive Research to Boost K–8 Achievement aims to combine the best of both of those worlds and offers a third option that is both research-based *and* practical. I know from my own administrative experience in raising student achievement in a low-performing school that strategy instruction is a necessary (albeit insufficient) piece of the reading puzzle (McEwan, 2002a). I also know the importance of selecting research-based strategies and instructional methods. All strategy instruction is not created equal. There is no point in wasting valuable instructional time on appealing activities that don't get results. The administrators and teachers who attend my workshops know that I frequently invoke the dean of American college basketball coaches, John Wooden, on that topic, who preached, "Do not mistake activity for achievement" (Wooden & Jamison, 1997, p. 20).

THE GOALS OF THIS BOOK

Cognitive strategy instruction has come a long way since my faculty and I first tinkered with it more than twenty years ago. My observations in retrospect are similar to those made by cognitive strategy guru Michael Pressley (2000):

The scientific community has made great progress in learning how good readers decode and understand text; they have also made great progress in the last 25 years in demonstrating the potency of teaching students to use the processes that good readers use. I am thrilled by this progress. As it turns out, however, there are those who continue to argue against direct teaching of reading skills, believing that children's literacy development is best stimulated by immersion in literacy experiences alone. Moreover, in the same 25 years when so much scientific progress was made, the whole-language position was developed and came to predominate in the language arts marketplace. I am hopeful that during the second quarter century of my career, the scientific community studying reading will be as successful in the schoolplace as it has been in the marketplace of academic ideas during the first quarter century of my career. (p. 48)

I share Pressley's hopes for the next twenty-five years, and in some sense I have written this book in response to his wish for a more widespread dissemination of the research regarding the learning power to be found in the direct teaching of cognitive strategies. I have written *Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers* with the following goals in mind:

- To summarize and explain a substantial body of relevant scientific research as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 as it converges

around three areas of knowledge: cognitive science, reading comprehension, and strategic instruction³

- To define and explain the seven strategies that highly effective readers routinely use and that all educators need to employ in their own reading to become strategic teachers
- To give K–8 (kindergarten through Grade 8) educators a sampling of instructional activities to facilitate cognitive strategy instruction
- To present an instructional planning template that will assist educators in infusing cognitive strategy instruction into every subject and lesson they teach
- To convince educators that strategy instruction done well is not more work but, rather, the most effective and important work a teacher can do, not only for its power to boost student achievement but for the benefits that will accrue to students in their academic and future lives

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THIS BOOK

Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers contains the following features:

- Teacher Think-Alouds to help you model the use of cognitive strategies for your students
- Instructional templates to help you plan cognitive strategy instruction
- Instructional activities to assist you in modeling, explaining, scaffolding, and facilitating the seven strategies before, during, and after reading
- Reproducible forms, posters, props, and prompts that provide ready-to-use instructional assistance for both students and teachers

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

One of the biggest obstacles to implementing cognitive strategy instruction is lack of confidence. You are not alone if you feel a bit uneasy regarding how to become a strategic teacher. “Many of today’s educators plan comprehension lessons with limited pedagogical knowledge” (Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002, p. xvi). As I travel the country working with teachers and principals, many struggling to improve the literacy levels of at-risk students, we examine the curricular, instructional, and environmental variables that can be altered in their classrooms, schools, and district (Bloom, 1980; McEwan, 2001, 2002b). One variable that consistently emerges as needing change is comprehension instruction. Some attendees are eager to integrate cognitive strategy instruction into their already overloaded day, but they recognize that without a schoolwide or even districtwide commitment, what they do in their individual classrooms may be “too little and too late” to help their students. Others are hesitant and a bit embarrassed to think aloud. Still others are reluctant readers themselves and need help in learning how to become strategic readers before they can

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model the strategies they use in their own reading. Whether you are an eager beaver who can't wait to get started or someone who needs a little push to try something new, I have written this book for you, as well as for the following groups of educators:

- K–8 classroom teachers who need a practical, easy-to-read, research-based introduction to cognitive strategy instruction⁴
- Content-area teachers who want their students to understand and retain challenging subject-matter text
- Administrators at both the building and central office levels who wish to implement cognitive strategy instruction in multiple classrooms or buildings
- School, grade-level, or content-area teams of teachers who need assistance in planning for the implementation of cognitive strategy instruction
- University-level teachers of preservice and graduate reading courses who desire a more organized approach to cognitive strategy instruction
- Staff development specialists who need a user-friendly text to guide discussion and study groups around the topic of cognitive strategy instruction

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

Chapter 1 defines strategic reading instruction, describes what a cognitive strategy is, explains the important ways that strategies differ from instructional activities and reading skills, and briefly introduces the seven cognitive strategies that highly effective readers routinely use. Chapter 2 focuses on specific research-based teaching practices that will help your students mature into highly effective readers. You will discover how to become a strategic teacher who is able to motivate and facilitate the development of the seven strategies in your students.

Chapter 3 provides a crash course on the critical attributes of the seven strategies, knowledge that is essential for effective instruction, while Chapter 4 introduces a variety of instructional activities to successfully teach the strategies—activities that you can adapt and adopt to fit your own personal teaching style. Chapter 5 explains how to integrate strategic reading instruction into your grade-level or content-area classroom routines with the goal of developing lifelong strategic readers. Chapter 6 concludes *Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers* with a discussion of schoolwide strategic reading instruction implementation.

NOTES

1. Brown, Day, and Jones (1983); Palincsar and Brown (1984); Raphael (1982, 1984); Raphael and Gavelek (1984); Raphael and Wonnacott (1985); Roehler and Duffy (1984); Rosenshine and Meister (1984).

2. Block, Gambrell, and Pressley (2002); Block and Pressley (2002); RAND Reading Study Group (2002); Taylor, Graves, and van den Broek (2000).

3. I use the term *scientific research* as defined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 (2002). “The term ‘scientifically based research’ (a) means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and (b) includes research that (1) employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment; (2) involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn; (3) relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators; (4) is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls; (5) ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and (6) has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review” (Olson & Viadero, 2002).

4. *Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers* could readily be used by high school teachers since the seven strategies of highly effective readers are especially applicable in Grades 9–12 and many of the instructional activities in Chapter 4 designed for middle school students could easily be adapted to the high school level. However, the challenge of creating think-alouds that would fully serve the needs of the K–12 grade span, as well as the inclusion of multiple activities for the primary grades, dictated the selection of a K–8 designation in the title. However, if you are a high school administrator or teacher, you will find much to inform strategic reading instruction in your high school.