

# HOW RESEARCH EXPLAINS THE DESIGN OF THE READ SIDE BY SIDE READING PROGRAM

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Once a reader has developed fluent word recognition skills and begins to encounter harder and longer pieces of text, comprehension becomes the major focus of reading instruction (Chall, 1996). Becoming a strong reader is a matter of motivation, strategies and knowledge; each aspect of reading reinforces the other. It requires will or motivation to engage in the deep strategic thinking that some texts demand (Alexander, 2003). Knowledge propels strategy use. The more knowledge readers bring to a text the more they are able to make text connecting

inferences, determine importance, and monitor their reading (Braten & Samuelson, 2004). Knowing what strategies to use and when to employ them emboldens a reader and pumps up his motivation. He thinks, "I have the skills to understand this complex text," the successful use of strategies enhances motivation.

## Motivation

In the reading program developed by *Read Side by Side* motivation is central. When Sarah Collinge and Bethany Robinson developed the program they selected books that third through sixth graders wanted to read, avoiding texts written specifically for the purpose of learning to read, as are the leveled books in basal programs (Dewitz, Leahy, Jones & Sullivan, 2010) and the collections of texts created for Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001). The books in the *Read Side by Side Reading Program* capture themes that are important to students, themes of survival, right and wrong, civil rights, animal rights, and personal journeys.

Beyond the intrinsic interest of the materials, the C.I.A. Approach develops motivation through the design of the program. In the read-aloud phase of instruction students carefully learn about text structure and comprehension strategies. When the students move into the book club phase of the program they use the same strategies that were modeled for them. This builds confidence and a sense of efficacy; both are important components of motivation (Dweck, 1985, Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, Weiner, 1992).

## Comprehension Strategies and Text Structure Knowledge

Comprehension strategies play a large role in the *Read Side by Side Reading Program*. As the students and their teacher read the books in read-aloud and bookclubs they predict, infer, clarify, ask and answer questions, and summarize; all are strategies affirmed by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health, & Human Development (US), 2000) and the *Rand Reading Study Report* (Snow, 2002) and in numerous literature reviews (See Duke, Pearson, Strahan & Billman, 2011). More critically, these strategies are modeled and introduced to solve text-processing problems, a concept stressed by Duffy (1983) and his colleagues many decades ago and affirmed by Margaret McKeown (2009) and her colleagues more recently. McKeown's work is more telling because she demonstrated that helping students understand the ideas in a text and how they connect builds stronger comprehension than does an abstract focus on strategies. The *Read Side by Side Reading Program* focuses directly on comprehending the ideas in the text by helping students track the author's line of thinking.

Knowledge of text structure is also vital to improving reading comprehension and the *Read Side by Side Reading Program* works to develop text structure knowledge (Meyer, Brandt & Bluth, 1980; Richgels, McGee, Lomax & Sheard, 1987 & Gersten, Fuchs, Williams & Baker,

2001). While text structure knowledge is not strictly speaking a strategy, text structure knowledge gives rise to strategic thinking by guiding the reader's predictions and providing a scaffold for organizing, remembering and retelling information. From the first point in a novel when the reader is sorting out characters, setting and goals, to the end point of the novel when the reader is grappling with theme, his knowledge of text structure drives his thinking.

### Transfer of Training

It is not enough to teach strategies; they must be internalized and applied by the readers. Basal Reading Programs and Guided Reading largely ignore the issue of transfer. In basal programs strategies are explained and modeled, often not well, and then applied to worksheets and other short inauthentic texts (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009). These programs ignore the issue of transfer to real texts (Solomon & Perkins, 1989). In Guided Reading, strategies are rarely fully explained and modeled, they rely on mini-lessons, but are applied as needed when the readers encounter a problem. Instruction is opportunistic not premeditated. The *Read Side by Side Reading Program* successfully embraces the issue of modeling and transfer. Because the strategies and text structure principles are modeled and applied in the read aloud portion of the program the students are able to employ the same strategies when

working with their book club. This is called the principle of high road transfer, conscious thought, that guides students to use what they have learned (Perkins & Solomon, 2012). Transfer is supported through the extensive use of graphic organizers (reference) and working with peers (Kagan, 1990).

## Knowledge of Words and the World

**T**he *Read side by Side Reading Program* carefully builds students' vocabulary and world knowledge. It is well founded that knowledge is the best predictor of reading comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Kintsch, 1998, McNamara, Floyd, Best & Louwse, 2004). In each book the teacher carefully teaches the vocabulary words that are critical to comprehension following the guide-lines of Graves (Graves, Baumann et al., 2014) and his colleagues on selecting vocabulary words. The sequence of books in each unit of study propels knowledge development. For example, the book in the read-aloud introduces the theme and theme is developed in the book club selections. Prior knowledge is developed before each book is begun, and adjunct non-fiction articles build further knowledge for the students.

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