Introduction

At the request of the U.S. Congress and after considerable research, the National Reading Panel (NRP) produced a report on effective reading instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000a). The objective was to provide guidance to teachers, administrators, and researchers and lead to improved reading instruction. One major area of the report focused on instruction in reading comprehension. It is hard to imagine a more influential development in the last decade than that seen in reading comprehension instruction.

The Panel’s subgroup focusing on comprehension and comprehension instruction analyzed over 200 studies. Based on that analysis, the report described comprehension instruction in three dimensions:

1. Developing an awareness and understanding of the reader’s own cognitive processes that are amenable to instruction and learning.

2. Having a teacher guide the reader through—or model for the reader—the actions (strategies) the reader can take to enhance comprehension processes.

3. Having the reader practice those actions (strategies) with the teacher assisting
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until the reader gradually internalizes those processes and masters them independently. (NICHHD, 2000b, p. 3).

These three dimensions are essential to the Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers program. This comprehensive reading program provides focus lessons on reading comprehension instruction. Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers is based on research, and it offers an instructional model that leads to a gradual release of responsibility. That is, instruction begins with the teacher “modeling and sharing cognitive secrets…gradually turn[ing] over more responsibilities…[with] the ultimate goal…to fade out of the picture so students can apply the strategy independently.” (Pearson and Fielding, 1991, pp. 848-849).

This paper explains the rationale behind the program and briefly describes how the Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers program brings the benefits of the research into the classroom.

Theoretical Framework and Rationale

The theory behind Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers lies in knowing what actions good readers take while reading (good habits) and what teachers can do to teach students to take those actions. In other words, “what do good readers do” and “what do good teachers of reading comprehension do?”

What Do Good Readers Do?

Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers is grounded first in our understanding of how good readers comprehend what they read. The research shows that good readers have formed good reading habits and apply proven reading strategies. Paris, Wasik, and Turner (1991) described strategic reading as “a prime characteristic of expert readers because it is woven into the fabric of children’s cognitive

“Reading comprehension is the nexus between meaning and interpretation”
development and is necessary for success in school” (p. 609).

They further placed these reading strategies into three clusters:

*Before reading:* previewing the text, making predictions

*During reading:* identifying main ideas, making inferences, inspecting the text (looking forward and back in the text)


The profession’s understanding of these and other reading comprehension strategies has expanded since that time. Other studies have focused on other proven strategies, particularly in regard to the role of self-generated questions, mental imagery (Borduin, Borduin, and Manley, 1994), and critical literacy (Luke, 2000).

Over time, all of these strategies become the habits of readers who love to read, read with purpose, and understand what they read. The research has shown that these are the things good readers do. Thus, the *Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers* program features these essential reading comprehension strategies at every grade level to ensure that every student becomes a great reader.

### What Do Good Teachers of Reading Comprehension Do?

To bring students to the point of internalizing good reading habits, good teachers employ a number of explicit teaching techniques—the things good reading teaches do.

**Provide direct explanations.**

The teacher explains the comprehension strategy (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, Vavrus, Book, Putnam, and Wesselman, 1986). These direct explanations must involve both the procedure and the purpose of the strategy for students to understand how the particular strategy can solve comprehension problems. As the National Reading Panel (2000a) advised, reading comprehension instruction must also include modeling and

“Research shows that explicit teaching techniques are particularly effective for comprehension strategy instruction. In explicit instruction, teachers tell readers why and when they should use strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include direct explanation, teacher modeling ("thinking aloud"), guided practice, and application.”

(Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborne, p. 53).
supportive guidance for students to acquire the tools needed to understand text.

Think aloud to foster *metacognition* (teacher modeling). Baker and Brown (1984) described the role of metacognition in reading as “the ability to reflect on one’s own cognitive processes, to be aware of one’s own activities while reading” (p. 353). Effective reading teachers help students gain this kind of awareness by “thinking aloud” by modeling how good readers use comprehension strategies to understand (Davey, 1983). In this manner, young readers gain insight into how they can use the tools of comprehension.

Facilitate peer learning through *partner talk* (guided practice and application.) Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, and Schuder (1996) investigated the effectiveness of peer discussion in deepening and refining understanding of reading comprehension strategies. Called “transactional strategies instruction,” these conversations follow teacher modeling and provide students with an opportunity to apply the strategy to a piece of text and discuss their decisions for doing so.

**Good Habits, Great Readers**

Knowing the theory behind the *Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers* program, let’s examine briefly how the program implements the research findings.

The *Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers* program helps students build the habits of mind that great readers possess. The habits emphasized in the program have been developed with research in mind.

The program is distinguished by its units of study for whole class reading focus lessons. The units of study remain constant through K-5, while the texts become more complex and the use of the reading comprehension strategies deepens.

1. **Great Readers See Themselves as Readers**

The *Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers* program begins each school year with a
unit focused on the habits and dispositions of effective readers. Consistent with the priorities of classroom teachers, the unit begins with “Taking Care of Books.” Focus lessons deal with proper book handling. This segment gives the teacher the opportunity to teach classroom procedures while also introducing literacy content. This unit ensures that, from the start of the year, students are learning about the value of books, as well as about their competence in handling them. Students who perceive themselves as being competent at tasks are more likely to be successful academically (Bandura, 1989).

Young readers must develop a sense of self as readers so they can choose books that meet their purposes. The ability to choose books is critical because it engages students in the world of reading (Fresch, 1995). Knowing one’s preferences for topics, settings, and authors is essential in building lifelong readers (Baker, Dreher, and Guthrie, 2000). Students in the Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers program learn about their choices and preferences through modeled instruction.

Of course, choices and preferences are of little consequence if a reader lacks the persistence to finish a book. For that reason, the first unit ends with a week of conversations about the habits of readers who possess the stamina to read, including rereading favorite books, reading every day, and looking forward to the next book (Calkins, 2001).

2. Great Readers Make Sense of a Text

A technique proven to be effective in helping students make sense of text is reciprocal teaching. This is “an instructional procedure in which teachers and students take turns leading discussions about shared text. The purpose of these discussions is to achieve joint understanding of the text through the flexible application of four comprehension strategies: prediction, clarification, summarization, and question generation” (Palincsar and Klenk, p. 116).

“…multiple strategy instruction that is flexible as to which strategies are used and when they are taught over the course of a reading session provides a natural basis on which teachers and readers can interact over text.” (NICHD, 2000b, p. 9)
Each of these strategies is complex, and students need many opportunities to use them and discuss their use. The original developers of the technique estimated that students require approximately 20 days of practice to become proficient with the process of each comprehension strategy (Palincsar and Brown, 1984).

Teachers using the Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers program introduce four comprehension strategies in the unit “Great Readers Make Sense of Text.”

**Prediction** is a “before reading” strategy that helps young readers make sense of text. Through teacher modeling and think-alouds, students are introduced to prediction as a means for anticipating text and activating their background knowledge (Langer, 1981, 1984).

**Summarization.** Young readers can make greater sense of text when they know how to effectively use summarization. Explicit teaching of summarizing appears to improve memory and recall of details, as well as of main ideas discussed in the text (Armbruster, Anderson, and Ostertag, 1987; Baumann, 1984). Younger and less effective readers, however, wait until the end of the reading to summarize (Paris, Wasik, and Turner, 1991), which is not very effective. The focus lessons in the “Make Sense of Text” unit enable teachers to model for students how to summarize throughout a reading for greater understanding.

**Question generation.** Young readers can make greater sense of text when they know how to generate their own questions. Question generation helps readers monitor their understanding.

Question generation is also useful for **solving problems** (clarifying) encountered in the text. For young readers, problems often occur at the word level. Effective readers notice when there is a problem with a word and apply strategies to correct the error (Baker and Brown, 1984). Pressley points...
out that “[i]n doing so, comprehension in general should be improved, for much more of the text will be correctly decoded (2000, p. 552).

3. Great Readers Use What They Know

The units in the *Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers* program build upon one another to deepen continually young readers’ metacognitive awareness of comprehension. Thus, the unit “Great Readers Use What They Know” capitalizes on students’ growing sense of the reader’s role in making connections, activating background knowledge, using vocabulary, and making inferences.

The lessons in this unit challenge students to use their background knowledge to take an active role in making connections between themselves and the text, other texts, and the larger world (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997). Although the popular terminology of classrooms is text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world, its foundations can be found in the research of the relationship between a reader’s schema and his or her ability to comprehend a text (Anderson, 2004).

**Vocabulary** and reading comprehension are closely linked because of the relationship between words and conceptual knowledge (Beck, Perfetti, and McKeown, 1982). Students learn vocabulary in a variety of ways, including within the context of the reading itself. This happens through direct instruction (Stahl, 1983) and application of intentional strategies to figure out the meaning of the words (Blachowicz and Fisher, 2000).

The focus lessons in this unit enable the teacher to model both methods within the context of books to show students how to use the words they know to help them in figuring out the meaning of words they do not know.

**Inferring** is among the most difficult of the reading comprehension strategies, as many teachers can attest. Students have labored for years with little success under the decidedly unhelpful “read

…”elementary students can be taught to be active as they read in the sense of using a variety of comprehension strategies to make sense of the meanings encoded in text. When they were taught strategies like the ones that excellent readers report as they read, comprehension, in fact, improved dramatically in validation studies to date.”

(Pressley, 2000, p. 556)
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between the lines” cue. However, the ability to infer meanings not explicitly stated is a linchpin to comprehension (Collins, Brown, and Larkin, 1980). Since many readers tend to infer only at the minimal level necessary (McKoon and Ratcliff, 1992), it is essential that the teacher create time and opportunity for students to infer at deeper levels (Kintsch, 2004).

The focus lessons provide teacher modeling of this critical strategy. Encouraging student’s to use what they know to infer meaning.

4. Great Readers Understand How Stories Work

Narrative stories possess characteristics and structures that knowledgeable readers use to understand text. These characteristics and structures, referred to as story grammar, include characters, setting, problem, solution, and plot. Young readers need to understand these elements if they are to anticipate, retell, and analyze story events. Children who are instructed in these elements—who learn story grammar—achieve higher levels of comprehension (Baumann and Bergeron, 1993; Davis, 1994). Therefore, the unit “Great Readers Understand How Stories Work” begins with modeling and discussion of story grammar.

Because the relationship between reading and writing is so important, readers also need to understand the literary devices authors use to make stories come alive. These devices are particularly useful for fostering mental imagery, inferencing, and other important strategies used by effective readers to support comprehension (Borduin, Borduin, and Manley, 1994).

The focus lessons in the Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers program use books and poems to expose students to a variety of literary devices, including onomatopoeia, alliteration, hyperbole, and foreshadowing.

“To support young children in developing literacy, high-quality literature including narrative and expository works is used during literature-based instruction (Sharer, 1992). This type of instruction, which has been increasingly emphasized in reading research and practice, provides authentic learning experiences and activities using literature to teach and foster literacy.” (Morrow and Gambrell, 2001, p. 348).
5. Great Readers Read to Learn

Students in elementary schools are benefiting from instruction in reading informational texts, thanks to several influential studies. Information texts are nonfiction texts, which convey information about the materials of social world.

Moss and Newton (2002) reviewed elementary basal readers and found a decided lack of informational selections. Similarly, Duke (2000) studied 20 first grade classrooms and found that among the 10 classrooms in low socioeconomic schools, children were exposed to informational print for an average of just 3.6 minutes per day.

The Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers program provides teachers and their students with many opportunities to interact with nonfiction text for the purposes of reading to learn. This unit begins with a series of focus lessons on learning information through reading and is followed by lessons about establishing and monitoring purpose.

Text features, such as the table of contents, captions, diagrams, and the index, serve as organizers and meaning markers. Being aware of these features can help young readers with problem solving, summarizing, inferencing, and other comprehension strategies. Using these tools, readers can more effectively read to learn.

This brief overview identifies the many good habits (strategies) that great readers have. Learned individually, these strategies have to be used collectively. Students need to understand how effective readers consolidate the use of multiple strategies to understand texts. As Fountas and Pinnell note, “powerful strategies must be applied day after day across many different opportunities” (p. 14, 2003).

Thus, the final week of the “Reading to Learn” unit focuses on using multiple strategies to understand. The National Reading Panel (NRP) finds “considerable scientific support

“In this Information Age the importance of being able to read and write informational texts critically and well cannot be overstated. Informational literacy is central to success, and even survival, in advanced schooling, the workplace, and the community.”

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for its (using multiple strategies/metacognition) effectiveness as a treatment, and it is the most promising for use in classroom instruction where teachers and readers interact over texts” (2000b, p. 9).

6. Great Readers Monitor and Organize Ideas and Information as They Read

As students learn how to read, they learn to track information and hold it in their short- and long-term memories. One method for developing this ability is to show young children how effective readers make notes about the text. Students can make notes using language charts, stickie note pads, and graphic organizers. Bromley observed, “organizers show important ideas and information and relationships among concepts in texts” (1999, p. 169).

The unit “Great Readers… Monitor and Organize Ideas and Information as They Read” features focus lessons on creating notes as a class and individually, using narrative and informational texts.

Marie Clay noted, “children learn to monitor themselves to keep their correct reading on track, and when something seems to be wrong they usually search for a way to get rid of the dissonance. It is important for teachers to notice self-monitoring because the process is a general one required in all reading” (2001, p. 185).

Monitoring and self-correction are forms of self-repair that all effective readers use to maintain understanding of the text. This section of the unit provides teachers with focus lessons to model and scaffold the processes for their young readers.

The final part of this unit allows teachers and students to return to visualizing, this time as a means to maintaining comprehension. Building on the mental imagery addressed in previous units, students use illustrations, background knowledge, dialogue, and vocabulary to extend their understanding. Visualizing also helps them notice when their understanding is different from others’ (Borduin, Borduin, and Manley, 1994).
7. Great Readers Think Critically About Texts

The leading edge of literacy research is critical literacy and its role in comprehension. Critical literacy “views readers as active participants in the reading process and invites them to move beyond passively accepting the text’s message to question, examine, or dispute the power relations that exist between readers and authors” (McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004, p. 14). The goal of critical literacy is not to criticize a text, but rather to ask important questions about the author, the characters, and the message. At times, these conversations involve evaluation at a personal level, as students grow to know themselves as readers.

In the unit “Great Readers… Think Critically About Texts”, young readers are extended an invitation to engage with books through personal experiences. Every reader needs to develop the habit of paying attention to his or her personal responses to a text, such as the reasons for liking or disliking a particular reading.

These evaluations are extended to informational texts as well. The teacher revisits previously read books to examine the sources of information and the role of the author in developing the books. As students evaluate nonfiction, they are asked to consider the purpose for the book and how the author might have obtained the information.

The next good reading habit involves responding to characters, especially in noticing how characters behave and how time and place influence people. Kate DiCamillo, author of the Newbery award-winning book Tales of Despereaux (2004) says about characters:

For me, both as a reader and as a writer, character is story. Character is the engine, the powerful, complex, whirring, humming, intricate thing that pulls me forward when I’m reading and that pulls the story forward when I’m writing (Camillo, 2005, p. 29).

The final habit in the critical literacy unit involves distinguishing fantasy and
Students learn how to effectively examine a text prior to reading in order to understand what the text might be about.

**Conclusion**

The *Celebration Press: Good Habits, Great Readers* program has been developed using the large body of comprehension research that explores what readers need to do, and how their teachers can help them. Learning from an instruction model focused on gradual release of responsibility, young readers integrate multiple strategies in ways that lead to independent reading. By allowing the text to signal the reader, children learn to consolidate comprehension strategies in a fluid and natural way.

References


