

Big Ideas from Dr. Joe Torgesen's Presentation on Reading Comprehension Research

National Reading First Comprehension Conference

Summer Institutes Presented by BIE RF, NM RF and WRRFTAC

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1. VOCABULARY

- Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important.
- The most effective methods of teaching vocabulary so that it influences reading comprehension involve a balance of definitional information, experience and repeated exposure to words in multiple contexts.
- There is a difference of about 2,000 root words in vocabulary of bottom quartile and average students at the end of 2nd grade.
- To address the large differences in vocabulary size associated with differences in SES, we also have to employ methods that provide at least brief instruction in the meaning of *many* words (research suggests 25 – 40 weekly).
- We must find ways (i.e. fast-mapping) to devote more time to vocabulary instruction if we are to "close the SES-related achievement gap."

2. FLUENCY

- Fluency (Reading Rate) is *causally* related to reading comprehension.
- Reading rate is also correlated with comprehension because of its correlation with other things (vocabulary, SES, ELL status) that influence performance on comprehension tests.
- Students successful on reading comprehension tests actually can have widely varying reading rates.
- Words that students can read fluently with no pauses between sounds have become sight words.
- **Helping students become more fluent readers will definitely improve their comprehension—but to get maximum effects, we need to do other things that have an impact on variables like vocabulary, use of active comprehension strategies, etc.*

3. READING COMPREHENSION

- Proficient readers monitor their comprehension more actively and effectively than less proficient readers
- Proficient readers are more likely to use a variety of active cognitive strategies to enhance their comprehension and repair it when it breaks down.
- Effective long-term instruction will most likely involve teaching students to flexibly use *multiple strategies* to improve their comprehension of text.
- Effective instruction requires many opportunities for students to discuss and interpret text using the application of strategies as a way of structuring the discussion.
- The focus of strategy instruction should always be on constructing the meaning of the text.
- Effective strategy instruction always involves explicit description and modeling of strategies by the teacher.
- Effective strategy instruction always involves extended discussions of text in which the teacher scaffolds student strategy use.