

The Definition and Application of Metacognition to the Teaching of Reading

Who's Afraid of Metacognition?

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Before you admit your fear, do you actually know what METACOGNITION is? What does that term actually mean? Is it in the dictionary? Have you ever heard someone use the word?

DEFINITIONS:

Let's start with a couple of definitions:

THE DICTIONARY of READING TERMS calls METACOGNITION "The awareness of and knowledge of one's mental processes such that one can monitor, regulate and direct them to a desired end; self-mediation; serious thought about thinking (cognition); thinking about how to understand some difficult text or poetry.

PROFESSOR FLAVELL, in 1976, called it a process of guiding student knowledge acquisition and awareness of thinking. His example involved the way he looked at involvement in Metacognition. (We capitalize Metacognition here, though it sometimes is written in lower case, reflecting the difference between a theory and practice.) Flavell felt that if he had trouble learning one of two concepts, he should refer to a third concept before accepting one fact as easier. He actually was monitoring and regulating cognitive powers.

MILLER, NEWELL and SCHOENFIELD refer to meta usage as being central to planning, problem-solving, and language acquisition.

THE ANDERSEN GROUP quotes that the components for metacognition are: 1) prepare and plan for learning, 2) select and use learning strategies, 3) monitor strategies usage, 4) orchestrate various strategies, and 5) evaluate use of strategies.

Other views refer to higher order thinking (Wiggins and Mc Tighe), Thinking about thinking, BIG THINKING, Successful learning, meta-memory; self-evaluation of progress refer to this interesting topic, as well.

As we prepare to use Metacognition ourselves, let us first agree: **Reading consists of two main stages: Learning to Read and Reading to Learn.** Knowing this, we can place Metacognition in the Reading to Learn stage. Having placed Metacognition in the process, we should be able to

move forward with the knowledge that students in this group will be READERS ready to talk about their reading experience.

The 90s became an open field for the Metacognitive practitioner. Educators felt obligated to become 'meta' and began to talk about thinking on a "higher level." Self-questioning and self-evaluation would bring about thinking about one's thinking, self-regulation, and Metacognition in the true sense.

Harvey and Goudvis amended their thinking to include four kinds of readers from Tacit (unaware of thinking while reading), to Aware (Recognize meaning as confusing but are unable to fix it) to Strategic (Use strategies to self-monitor) and Reflective (Reflect on their use of strategies, goal setting and revision). Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman in *Subjects Matters* refer to Metacognition, "Good readers have a repertoire of strategies they use to comprehend texts."

BRINGING METACOGNITION TO THE READING CLASSROOM

There are many teaching strategies that aid in the transfer of Metacognitive thought to the classroom. The following are three Metacognitive strategies to begin the conversion of methods. They include: the Think Aloud, Wrappers, and Pre-, During, and Post- Meta Strategies.

A. Think Alouds

(*Think Alouds* are a way of creating a record of strategies and reporting so that readers are aware of those reading strategies.)

Conducting a Think Aloud

1. Teacher models while reading aloud.
2. Teacher models self-questioning, student helps with query.
3. Student also may question or comment.
4. May continue on overhead or in journal.
5. Small group as teacher monitors.
6. Individual ST TA during independent reading.

B. Wrappers

The use of a wrapper includes deliberately surrounding an already existing assignment or activity with another previously completed and appropriate task.

This requires self-monitoring by the student and minimal faculty time; it encourages the development of self-regulation and especially self-efficacy on the part of the student.

C. Pre-, During and Post-Metacognitive Strategies

The following checklists encourage and report Metacognitive behaviors that students use before, during, and after reading. The checklists should be used in a one-on-one situation with time taken for note-taking and some discussion. When used routinely, the checklists encourage students to become comfortable with using and improving their reading through Metacognitive strategies.

Checklist of Strategies Students Should Use BEFORE Reading

Student's Name _____ Observation Date _____

Pre-Reading Strategy: (Brainstorm, KWL, Web)	Indications of Student's Use of Strategy	Notes . . .
Predicting		
Skimming		
Questioning		
New Vocab. Predicting		
Visualize		
Set Purpose		

Checklist of Strategies Students Should Use DURING Reading

Student's Name _____ Observation Date _____

Strategies During Reading	Indicating Behaviors	Notes . . .
Reading rate adjusted	With purpose	
Predict/Support/Confirm/ Adjust	Prior knowledge/text support	
Question		
Self-Correct		
Reread		

Checklist of Strategies Students Should Use AFTER Reading

Student's Name _____ Observation Date _____

After Reading Strategies	Indicating Strategy in Use	Notes . . .
Predictions		
Retell		
Take Notes		
Make Inferences		
Reflect on Reading		