

INTERVENTIONS FOR COMPREHENSION

Activating Prior Knowledge

Purpose:

Improve Reading Comprehension

Description:

The instructor demonstrates to students how they can access their prior knowledge about a topic to improve comprehension of an article or story.

Materials:

1. Article or story (likely to have details that students can make a text to text connection)
2. Sample passage on an overhead
3. Prepare 3 main ideas from the article or story
4. Prepare 2 questions: for each of the 3 main ideas: 1. which elicits student's prior knowledge of the article/story's idea 2. Which prompts a student's prediction about the article/story

Procedure/Steps:

The instructor first explains the benefit of using prior knowledge.

1. The instructor tells students that recalling their prior experiences ("their own life") can help them to understand the content of their reading – because new facts make sense only when we connect them to what we already know.
2. Next, the instructor demonstrates the text prediction strategy to the class by selecting a sample passage (displayed as an overhead) and using a "think-aloud" approach to illustrate the strategy steps:
 - *Think about what and why:* The teacher connects the article to be read with the instructor's own prior knowledge about the topic. The teacher might say, for example, "I am about to read a short article about [topic]. Before I read the article, though, I should think about my life experiences and what they might tell me about [topic]. By thinking about my own life, I will better understand the article."
3. *Select main ideas from the article to pose prior knowledge and prediction questions:*
 - The teacher chooses up to 3 main ideas that appear in the article or story.
 - For each key idea, the instructor poses one question requiring that readers tap their own prior knowledge of the idea (e.g., "What are your own attitudes and experiences about [idea]?")
 - And another that prompts them to predict how the article or story might deal with the idea (e.g., "What do you think the article will say about [idea]?")
4. *Have students read the article independently:*
 - Once the teacher has primed students' prior knowledge by having them respond to the series of prior-knowledge and prediction questions, students read the selection independently.

Evaluation of Effectiveness:

Compare scores on comprehension skills before and after the intervention.

Sources:

RTI Toolkit by Jim Wright 2007.