Using comprehension strategies as a springboard for student talk

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After teacher modeling of read-aloud and guided-reading strategies, student-driven conversations “take off” with questioning in literature circles.

In training a child to the activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call “inert ideas”—that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations (Alfred North Whitehead, as cited in Lincoln & Suid, 1986, p. 130)

To test and throw ideas into fresh combinations is the challenge before educators as they engage students in genuine conversations with literature, real “talk.” With increased emphasis on testing results, how does an educator elevate literature instruction to a conversation rich with ideas? How can educators shift from using literature-circle roles described by Daniels (2002) to using comprehension strategies as a springboard for rich conversations? Reflection on these questions prompted my investigation into this shift. In this article, I detail the progression of my own experience implementing comprehension strategy instruction as the conduit for effective discussions through the gradual release of responsibilities. I conclude with implications for instruction to foster genuine student talk with literature.

Strategies and roles

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) and Goudvis and Harvey (2000) promoted seven main comprehension strategies as a springboard for teachers as they engage students in literature discussions. Goudvis and Harvey listed the following comprehension strategies that active, thoughtful readers use when constructing meaning from text: making connections (personal, text to text, and text to world), questioning, inferring, visualizing, determining importance, synthesizing, and monitoring. They added that Keene and Zimmerman expanded the list with making “sensory images” (p. 7).

Instruction in America’s elementary reading classes has been based on this theory: a series of comprehension questions—coming from the basal reader or the teacher—were posed, and the goal was to see if children could answer them in the way the teacher believed they should. (Keene & Zimmerman, p. 16)

Reflecting on this statement, I found myself in agreement as I recalled hours of designing questions related to a text, with the intent of encouraging higher order thinking skills, only to find that they engaged few of my students in a discussion. Keene (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) challenged teachers to reflect on the use of comprehension questions by stating that many “children were not (and are not) learning to comprehend using this approach, and they certainly
weren’t becoming proficient, independent, confident, critical readers” (p. 16). The challenge accelerated my shift away from the literature-circle roles to the explicit instruction of questioning as a reading strategy.

Daniels (2002) promoted the use of four basic student roles: (a) The “connector” makes connections between the text and his or her own life; (b) the “questioner” wonders about and analyzes the meaning of the text; (c) the “literary luminary” or passage master identifies parts of the text that are memorable; and (d) the “illustrator” provides a graphic depiction of the text. Even after I investigated and implemented the literature-circle roles as described by Daniels in the early 1990s, the literature discussions in my classroom were stilted and assignment driven and did not reflect a genuine give-and-take of ideas. Because too many students come through my classroom door who allow text to “wash over them” (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 6) as they read instead of actively participating in the process of understanding, I wanted to encourage engagement in the text through “talk” in literature discussion.

Babbitt (1996) agreed that literature circles have value as students test their ideas about a story through genuine talk but shared that students’ letters written to her after classroom discussion reflected a perfunctory response focused on what each child learned in the story. The students’ letters revealed that, instead of inspiring a heartfelt reaction from the reader, classroom talk focused on assignments. Babbitt implied that educators may have taken literature and turned the opportunity for rich conversation into an empty assignment. Daniels (2002) concurred that, “in some classrooms, the roles did become a hindrance, an obstacle, a drain” (p. 13). Yet he defended the role structure as a conduit for genuine discussions, as a temporary support to get the discussion groups started. Nevertheless, he concluded that the role structure could undermine the goal of student-directed, literature-circle discussions.

I resolved not to use roles in literature circles on the basis of past observations of students relying on a role simply to complete an assignment. The roles I assigned for discussion distanced the student from the text and resulted in a flat, oral recitation. My goal in focusing on a comprehension strategy was to shift the control of the discussion away from being a teacher-directed activity to being a student-driven conversation.

As I thought about Tovani’s (2000) experience in an adults’ book club, in which the discussion emerged from questions, and as I observed students exhibit passive behaviors in reading, it became apparent that my students needed to recognize the value of asking questions as they read. Reflecting on my anecdotal records taken during reading conferences, I noted that a majority of students were not asking themselves questions as they read. In addition, even the students who demonstrated “good” reading behaviors and asked themselves questions as they read did not realize how a question helped them understand the text, or how to use the strategy as a tool for aiding their comprehension of different genres. As a result, I decided to highlight the questioning strategy in response to my student needs and in my quest to prompt a real conversation with text.

The shift from literature-circle roles

Although 95% of educators agree that it’s valuable for students to participate in peer discussion (because it offers them new ways to learn about literature), and 77% indicate their interest in using peer discussions in their classrooms, it’s sad that only 33% of these same educators report using peer discussions with students (Almasi, Arya, & O’Flahavan, 2001). Perhaps the theoretical understanding and practice have not found their way into the U.S. classroom because teachers are still controlling the meaning of the text through questions designed (either by a basal series or by the teachers) to measure comprehension. Or perhaps the value attached to peer discussions diminishes
in the face of state testing. In the current atmosphere of accountability and assessment mania, educators perceive literature circles as the long way around to higher test scores. Goudvis and Harvey (2000) pointedly asked, “Why argue that teaching content (what students learn) is more important than teaching process (how students learn), or vice versa?” (p. 9). They contended we must teach both in order for a student to become a more thoughtful reader. The thoughtful, reflective reader will be able to question, infer, analyze, and interpret text and successfully negotiate meaning.

Recent research indicates a trend toward using a comprehension strategy to guide classroom conversation with texts. Whitin (2002) illustrated the integration of “visualization” to encourage genuine discussions, Smith (2000) described in her study an all-girls book club that allows the girls to “negotiate their identities and visit dangerous places” within the safety of a secure environment (p. 37), and Tovani (2000) demonstrated talking about text through her own experience in an adults’ book club as part of a staff development program. Through the process of asking genuine questions, literature discussions become more than an activity in which the reader is responsible for finding a specific predetermined meaning of the text; the questions invite students to interpret the text by illustrating the meaning and acknowledging the valuable insights each reader brings to the text. Students argued their points of view passionately and shared places in the text that substantiated their thinking.

Keehn and Roser (2002) focused on fourth graders as they read biographies, historical fiction, and nonfiction texts. Once students were actively participating in the strategy of asking questions, 26% of their sustained talk centered more on making inferences, 22% of the time they informed peers about discoveries in texts, and 20% of the time was spent interpreting newly discovered information to the group. No longer was a stimulant or mediator in the form of role assignments needed to sustain the conversations. The results indicated that the most productive conversations sprang from questions and wonderings.

Daniels (2002) explained that, in the early days of literature circles, most teachers used the role sheets as a tool for structuring the book club meetings, but now fewer take that path and instead instruct students to record thoughts in their reading-response logs. Daniels indirectly encouraged the use of comprehension strategies instead of the assigned roles as a conduit for conversation, citing two teachers who used journal reflections as the guide for literature-circle discussion.

Implementing comprehension strategy instruction

Implementing strategy instruction as the conduit for literature-circle discussion in the classroom takes several steps. As the reading specialist, I collaborated with a sixth-grade teacher and adopted his class for several months. The self-contained, sixth-grade class composed of 28 students represented a variety of backgrounds: Bulgarian, Vietnamese, Argentinian, Lebanese, Indian, Egyptian, Saudi Arabian, and American. The class was not designated as English as a second language (ESL). However, many of the second-language learners spoke their native language at home. The school was located in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city on the east coast of the United States.

The read-aloud

Using the model of Gradual Release of Responsibilities (see Figure 1), I planned my instruction (Baker, Dube, & Wilhelm, 2001). Beginning with the most supportive instructional technique, I began the study of asking questions using the book The Landry News (Clements, 1999) during the read-aloud. Each day as I read, I modeled the genuine questions prompted by the reading by thinking aloud. My criteria for the questions hinged on these genuine questions. In other words, I modeled only the questions that reflected my genuine thought processes. As the students
Figure 1
Gradual Release of Responsibilities model

Student’s responsibility
- Listens and enjoys text
- Begins to use the demonstrated comprehension strategy

Teacher’s responsibility
- Chooses the text
- Activates prior knowledge
- Reads text aloud
- Models fluent and flexible reading behaviors
- Focuses students on comprehension strategy through demonstration

Read-aloud

Student’s responsibility
- Chooses text
- Reads text independently
- Negotiates the pages to be read before each discussion
- Independently uses comprehension strategy in preparation for discussion
- Actively participates in literature circle, having read the material and recorded questions to discuss

Teacher’s responsibility
- Provides a selection of text for student choice
- Monitors discussions and use of strategy for future instruction

Guided reading

Student’s responsibility
- Reads the text with minimal support
- Practices the comprehension strategy with support from teacher and peers
- Self-monitors reading and identifies text challenges

Teacher’s responsibility
- Chooses text at instructional level
- Guides student practice of comprehension strategy
- Provides opportunity for practice of the strategy
- Monitors student use of reading strategies and assesses student understanding

Literature circles

Note. Adapted from Baker, Dube, and Wilhelm (2001).
heard in-the-head processes of asking questions, the modeled language demonstrated how genuine questions moved my thinking along. Immediately, students raised their hands with the “correct” answer to the questions; however, I didn’t answer the questions or allow the students to answer out loud, letting each question simmer in their minds. I often added another question to piggyback on the original to demonstrate the generative property of questions. This new approach of not allowing students the opportunity to answer the questions intrigued the class. By inviting students to mull over and silently appreciate the questions raised, I observed more and more of them “tune in” to the strategy.

After several days of modeling the use of questions through think-aloud, I began to stop throughout the reading and instruct students to record their own questions in reading logs. After they stopped to record questions in their journals, I invited several students to share one of these questions with the class. The initial questions asked were the typical ones that my students were used to hearing from the teacher. The questions shared reflected years of experience in the classroom (e.g., “Who are the characters?” “What did Mr. Larson have on?”). Questions were low level, informational, and easily answered with one or two words; however, some students began to shift to their genuine questions, which stretched the rest of the class and drove each reader deeper into the text.

Answering the questions continued to be off-limits because we wanted to “keep our minds thinking about the story.” Students began “oohing” over questions that really made us think. This prompted several discussions as a whole class on the value of a good question and how it helped each of us get deeper into the book. As I recorded each question on a chart, my students’ eyes were alive with their thoughts, and they pleaded with me to answer the questions raised by classmates. This process demonstrated for the students that there were many questions and many answers to consider when interpreting a book and that reading is an active, thoughtful process. After several weeks, students asked questions to clarify meaning, identify confusing vocabulary, and explore the author’s intentions. I also encouraged students to borrow questions from the chart for their own lists in their journals. Sometimes I gave students time to discuss the questions raised in pairs for a few minutes, but I found that it was the unanswered questions that kept the students engaged and thinking.

During these class discussions, I recorded contributions on a chart entitled “Why do good readers ask questions?” (see Figure 2). Students noticed the change in the questions being shared as the read-aloud progressed, and we discussed the types of question that would be the most interesting to talk about in a literature discussion. Students understood the strategy as a useful tool rather than a series of irrelevant skills. Later, they began to identify questions that caused them to search a confusing part of the text. As a result, students gained insight about the strategy of asking questions and applied the strategy to solving

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**Figure 2**

**A question chart**

- It helps the reader pay attention
- It helps the reader predict
- It helps the reader figure out what is important
- It helps the reader “think back”
- It helps the reader picture what the author intends
- It helps the reader make connections
- It helps the reader analyze characters
- It helps the reader focus on important information
- To figure out if something is confusing

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complex or confusing texts. This was the first step in students’ discovering the value of questions before and during reading.

The students’ desire to share the recorded questions intensified, so we began each new read-aloud time sharing some of the questions that had been noted the previous day. Students were amazed as a question brought their thoughts back to the meaning of the text in a split second. They discovered that a question triggered the mind more effectively than a lengthy retelling of the previous day’s reading.

Guided reading

After we spent several weeks exploring the concept as a whole class, I used guided reading to lessen the instructional support and yet scaffold the use of the strategy by introducing students to different genres. I noticed in social studies that my students did not know how the questions asked in a non-fiction text unlocked the meaning. The small-group format using an instructional-level text provided students with support as they discussed their questions. The questions asked in a narrative text to focus comprehension were very different from the type of questions that helped students comprehend nonfiction text. The group explored the genuine questions that students had as they read. This process helped them realize that some questions required further research in the library, while the questions that unlocked the meaning in a particular piece of nonfiction depended on focusing on the headings and boldface words.

I demonstrated how the structure of nonfiction text guides the reader in the kind of question that helps a reader understand the text. To understand the structural aid that the author provided in nonfiction, the group turned headings into questions that drove the students into the text for answers. When genuine questions about vocabulary emerged, students also noticed that the words critical to unlocking meaning were often boldface. The students helped each questioner solve the challenges associated with nonfiction text, and I supported the students with explicit instruction on such things as context clues and root words. Guided reading supported students as they began to practice the strategy with some teacher support still available, and I was able to monitor and assess students as they did this. As students practiced using questions in different genres, they grew in their flexible use of the strategy.

Developing schema and building community

Instructional challenges related to implementing literature circles with these students included differing reading ability levels, varying backgrounds, and ways to ensure that all the students participated in the discussion. I selected five novels set during the American Revolutionary War that represented a range of reading levels. The cultural differences among students added depth to many discussions, but these differences also added the challenge of limited background knowledge related to the war. To prepare the class for the novels and assess background knowledge, I had the students draw a picture of “war.” They shared their pictures verbally in pairs, and then they all collaborated in order to generate information based on their knowledge about war. Through the discussion, the students’ experiences and understandings built the schemata about the general concept of war and demonstrated the value of adding each voice to our collective knowledge. As students contributed knowledge to create a general understanding of war, they also practiced being a part of the community of readers as we negotiated the meaning of a complex concept together.

Literature circles

The instructional purpose of implementing literature circles around a comprehension strategy was for students to (a) enjoy, analyze, and interpret the book; (b) use the questions recorded as a catalyst for discussion; and (c) gain control and independence through genuine conversations around a text. The round-robin format of roles
was too restrictive and limited the reciprocity of real conversation. Through systematic observations with former groups, I noticed that the discussion became genuine when the students departed from the roles. Implementing a small-group format gave students the opportunity to explore the comprehension strategy and allowed for a greater number of students to participate in the discussion. In addition, the conversation modeled oral communication skills and the use of vocabulary in context for the ESL students.

Knowing that adolescents invest in reading when they have a choice, I instructed students to identify their top two choices for novels. I used the back-cover captions to hook the students’ attention with an enthusiastic book talk on each of five U.S. historical fiction novels. Students previewed the books with the goal of selecting their top two choices during independent reading. As students previewed the text, I gave them two simple questions to ask themselves after reading the first few pages: What was it about? Do I want to read on? I knew part of the discussion would require students to think metacognitively about the process of reading, so matching students to the appropriate level of text was important. During the previewing time, I circulated to each student with the goal of guiding the selection, but the ultimate decision was left entirely to the students. Using the choices made, I placed each student in a novel group.

I gave students clear guidelines and behavioral expectations through a sequence of activities that reflected my goals. To establish appropriate discussion guidelines for behavior, I used a “fishbowl” technique: First, several students volunteered to be the “fish” and model a discussion for the others to watch, then the class encircled the fish to observe the group discussion. The students in the fishbowl used their questions recorded during read-aloud as the springboard for discussion. I stopped the small-group conversation several times to facilitate analysis of the good parts and the parts that did not work. The class commented on the behaviors and content that contributed to a successful discussion. As a result, respecting the comments of others and valuing all questions became the established rules. The process of the fishbowl activity was another concrete demonstration that the success of the discussion depended on the literature-circle group, not the teacher.

When I introduced the idea of novel groups getting together to answer the interesting questions that students themselves were thinking, the enthusiasm grew. Students recognized immediately that the control of the discussion rested on their questions, and they were excited about asking peers the “unanswerable” or “genuine” questions simmering in their minds. During the next reading workshop, each group was given four meeting dates that spanned two and a half weeks. The book group decided on the number of pages to read for discussion in order to finish the book by the last meeting. Once the decision was made, students began reading the novel and recording their questions in their reading logs. An agreement was made not to discuss the questions until the literature circle met. The agreement built anticipation for the circle meeting. Students scheduled approximately two days of independent reading during reading workshop between each literature-circle group meeting in order to prepare. This gave me the opportunity to conduct individual conferences with students and continue to gather groups for guided-reading instruction.

On the first day of the literature-circle meeting, I implemented the following sequence as guidelines:

- In a short class discussion, we used a T chart to list what a literature circle looks and sounds like.
- Each student spent the first few minutes of reading workshop reviewing the questions recorded and putting a star next to the two most powerful questions (see Figure 3).
- Once students had selected their questions, they moved to the meeting place with their novel and reading log.
The students formed very tight circles with their chairs facing one another and knees touching.

Students then began sharing their starred questions and discussing the answers.

I circulated from group to group to record anecdotal notes.

The groups were given 20 to 30 minutes for the discussion with the option of returning to their desks when it was over to continue silent reading in the novel. (This option was not used by any group, but it did give students an additional “buy in” to the discussion.)

I assigned classroom meeting locations as far apart as possible so that the noise level was conducive for conversation.

The strategic focus on questioning gave students a tool for conducting a novel discussion. For example, the questions raised by the students—“Will they get the cannon out? How did they know the ice would refreeze? Why would the mountains be their worst enemy?”—promoted higher level thinking, which led to a rich discussion. The groups showed understanding of the novel as they used facts to prove their answers. For example, when answering the question on the difficulty of getting the cannon out of the river, Jonathan stated that it was “the largest and heaviest cannon”; Danny supported the statement, adding that it was “freezing, cold water”; and Devonte provided another dimension, saying that “when they got into the water they couldn’t open their eyes.” (All student names are pseudonyms.)

When they answered a question relating to the ice refreezing, Devonte connected to science facts: “In the winter the sun is further away from the earth.” Jonathan connected to real-life experiences by saying that “the snow stays a few days.” Danny added his own experience as proof, “At the end of the day it is always colder,” and Alex followed with another question, “What did they use on the ice?” They demonstrated their understanding of the text as they connected with other texts, connected to life experiences, and asked another question to clarify. Active participation was not something I had to remind students about because they were genuinely interested in the opportunity to talk about their reading. When Brandon wanted to add the facts he knew about General Lafayette, the rest of the group encouraged him by nodding and telling him, “It’s OK, it’s about the same time (period).”

Students in all groups reflected later on their discovery that a reader’s questions promote active reading. In addition, they learned that having control of the discussion was more challenging and interesting. The process encouraged self-directed learning. I discovered that taking notes as I listened to the discussion served four purposes: (a) I stayed out of the conversation and listened more; (b) when students saw me recording their comments, they attached importance to their contributions; (c) I had time to assess individual

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**Figure 3**

**Student sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did the Drunk soldier scare the horses?</td>
<td>I how did they know the ice would refreeze? Why would the mountains be their worst enemy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did J.P. believe it was a ghost?</td>
<td>Unselfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why would the mountains be their worst enemy?</td>
<td>Unselfish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. General of the Continental army
2. Approved of the new flag
3. Worried for Henry
4. Got the note
5. Worried about Howe

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Note: This student was reading *Guns for General Washington: A Story of the American Revolution* by Seymour Reit (2001, Gulliver Books).
students as they used the strategy; and (d) I used my notes at the end of the small-group discussion to compliment and praise individuals with specific comments as a part of the lesson summary. This feedback encouraged each student’s participation. Moreover, it communicated my expectations for the next small-group discussion.

As a member of the literary community, I joined the groups and modeled listening. I demonstrated by reacting honestly to the text and expressing myself in a nonjudgmental manner. It is important to model for students how to challenge an idea so that the students learn to stand up for their opinions without putting others down. As students shared different interpretations of the text, I listened carefully and asked open-ended, follow-up questions that genuinely sought more information.

Literature-circle results

The literature discussion “looked” completely different from the past experiences of using roles. The body language of each group spoke volumes as members leaned in to hear a peer’s question. The positive results of student-derived questions leading the discussion were observable in eye contact, leaning forward, animated reactions, and responses that sounded like a “real” conversation. Each member was invested in answering the questions raised and having his or her voice heard. The discussions became intense in some groups as the students argued their answers, using the text to prove their points. The questions covered a broad range: clearing up confusing concepts, vocabulary, and literary language and critically examining the meaningful concepts or themes. Students’ understanding of the text grew as they shared their questions and listened to the responses. Students used the strategy of asking questions to interpret, evaluate, and synthesize the text. Even the most reluctant readers were drawn in to the literature circles, which resembled conversations at lunch or on the playground.

At the end of each literature-circle meeting, the class discussed two questions: What was a powerful question raised in your group today? How did that question help you understand the book better? I charted the responses each time. We also brainstormed solutions to any problems, such as everyone talking at once, what to do when no one knows the answer, and how to ensure the group stays on track. Instead of my giving students the solution of putting a monitor in charge to keep the group on track, the students decided for themselves on the best way to make the discussion work.

Because the students had control of the discussion, it resembled a genuine conversation and naturally took some turns off track. To help students refocus on the task of discussing their book, I placed a tape recorder in the center of each group, explaining that I wanted to hear all of the discussions but couldn’t physically be in four places at once. The recorder served as an extension of my presence that reminded students to return to the focus of the text when they became sidetracked. After listening to the tapes after school, I shared with the class some specific compliments and observations based on the taped discussion. The response of the students was intense; they listened carefully to my comments and wanted to know if I had listened to all of the tapes. I told them it was my goal to listen to at least one or two after each literature-discussion period. I discovered they were excited that I monitored their conversations and looked forward to the specific comments the next day. I laughed out loud when I heard on one of the tapes, “Sorry, Mrs. Lloyd...we’re getting back on track now.” Students were monitoring their own “talk.”

The discussion was directed and controlled by the students’ genuine questions related to the text. Students shared their questions, and the group listened and provided feedback. Students referred to their written work to ask the questions and referred to the text to prove their points of view. This sequence of integrat-
ing reading, writing, listening, and speaking is achieved by having students read the novels during independent reading time, write questions in the reading logs, listen to the questions in the literature circle, and speak as they share and debate new interpretations. The integration of listening and speaking was evident as the group clarified, explained, and added more information to form an expanded interpretation of the text.

The questions and responses provided a window on the students’ thinking processes and the integration of the comprehension strategies. By listening carefully to each student, I noted the strategies relied on and those neglected—important information for future instruction. One of my more reserved students “woke up” to this genuine conversation, and he wanted to get his ideas on the table. He clarified with a comparison when he answered a question about the mountains being the greatest enemy in the American Revolutionary War. His hands moved expressively, communicating his desire to be heard by almost acting out his words. When one student commented, “That part put a picture in my mind,” another responded by telling exactly what he pictured. The personal investment in the questions intensified the students’ involvement in the discussion and gave them control over the material. Many students joined the community of learners for the first time.

My students were so enthused to read the next section of their books that they wanted to move the discussion dates closer together. The responses written after the discussions reflected the impact of student-driven “talk.” They included details from the book and were enriched with many facts that had been shared by the group members in the discussions. Students used the language of the novel in their journal responses (imitating the oral proofs), which is a skill that I had not seen them use before. Some students even continued the discussion at other times in the day, connecting the reading to the social studies text.

**Implications for literature discussion**

Rich discussion does not rest on a “real meaning” of the text as determined by the teacher. The student-led novel discussion generated genuine give-and-take that exceeded my expectations. My letting go of the control of the questions meant that students were not only empowered but were also discovering how to comprehend text using a strategy. Self-questioning as they read helped them understand the process as a tool that good readers use to understand texts.

In this article, I have demonstrated the gradual release of using the strategy of asking questions, but, as educators consider future implications of this shift toward comprehension strategies, there is the danger of a single focus becoming a heavy yoke restricting genuine talk, just as roles restricted conversation in the past.

We have moved on. We have left controlled, teacher-proof reading programs where we read “say this” in bold print. We have created readers’ workshops instead of reading classes and they are inviting places for children to learn and love to read.... As teachers we are happier and more creative than ever before, but if we don’t want to return to programmed reading instruction, we’re going to have to know what to teach instead. (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 19)

Goudvis and Harvey (2000) described comprehension as a complex process encompassing knowledge, experiences, and active thinking. I realized that I must not focus solely on comprehension strategies but begin to use them as designated roles in literature-circle discussions. To focus exclusively on one strategy undermines the integration of the strategies, which is the natural process as a reader makes sense of a text. Brabham and Villaume (2002) warned that a prolonged approach with a single-strategy focus can become intrusive and cumbersome to the accomplished reader. They emphasized that, in the attempt to develop thoughtful readers, methods must be examined carefully. Strategy instruction
is not a linear skill; as educators fine-tune literature discussions using comprehension strategies, there appears the danger that, without a reflective approach, I could end up creating instruction that invites a perfunctory response to literature.

To avoid the danger of a single-strategy focus, I monitored the comprehension strategies students neglected during independent reading. I noted that students used some of the strategies in their journals and neglected others. I discovered that the lens of comprehension strategies (making connections, asking questions, inferring, visualizing, determining importance, monitoring or fixing up, and synthesizing) could guide my instruction. The primary focus of all reading instruction became the in-the-head processes that unlock the meaning of the text. This emphasis was particularly helpful for the second-language learners as classmates identified strategies used and stated how they helped them understand the text. By the end of the year, these students could identify several strategies that were intertwined to gain meaning from a text. Although a singular focus introduced each strategy, I was careful to return to and link new strategies to old ones.

My own reflection was critical to implementing the strategy-based discussions, but just as important was my collaboration with colleagues and the availability of professional literature. Short (1999) called for ongoing professional development to provide teachers with the time to think, read, dialogue, and research. She added that teachers must be able to articulate their beliefs as informed, knowledgeable professionals to the public as the debate about education intensifies. The support that dialogue with other professionals provides is vital in developing informed teachers. Critical to growth in my teaching is the thoughtful discourse that ultimately transforms my understanding of reading. As educators consider the importance of having students interpret and analyze literature to understand the world around them through classroom discourse, they would do well to attend those words I quoted from Alfred North Whitehead.

REFERENCES