

MARY DEKONTY APPLGATE
KATHLEEN BENSON QUINN
ANTHONY J. APPLGATE

Profiles in comprehension

The authors identify eight common profiles of thinking that surface when students are given higher order questions and suggest strategies to improve comprehension.

It would be a classic example of “preaching to the choir” to exhort teachers to use questions to assess the reading comprehension of their students. Teachers have had a long love affair with questioning, dating at least back to the time of the ancient Greeks and the question-based teaching technique that came to be known as the Socratic Method. But researchers who have analyzed classroom interactions have arrived at a consistent and disconcerting finding. When it comes to assessing the reading comprehension of their students, teachers tend to use a large proportion of questions that require factual recall of information included in the text (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2002; Barr & Dreeben, 1991; Cazden, 1986; Durkin, 1979; Goldenberg, 1992). As Almasi and Gambrell (1994) have pointed out, when teachers use questions in this manner, they are calling for their students to engage in recitation. Recitation occurs when the answers to all questions under consideration are already known. All that remains is to commit those answers to memory.

Consistent questioning that encourages recitation in reading classrooms represents missed opportunities for teachers to model for their students the true nature of reading. As Ruddell (2001) powerfully emphasized, the questions that teachers ask help to shape student understanding and expectations about reading comprehension. Similar sentiments have been echoed by reading researchers and theorists for many years (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Pearson & Fielding, 1991). Langer (1992)

pointed out that to teach literature as a series of questions with right and wrong answers is to treat it as content rather than as a literary work to be thought about and interpreted.

There is, however, a widely used alternative to factual recall and recitation questions and that is the type of questioning that encourages students to engage in discussion. These questions have been variously designated as higher order, inference, scriptural, implicit, or aesthetic. No matter what their label, these kinds of questions have several common characteristics: They do not lend themselves to a single correct response, answers to them must be justified logically by readers, and they encourage discussion and the acknowledgment of multiple viewpoints.

Teachers who regularly use such higher order questions to engage pupils in discussion are likely to find that their students read more (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995). A considerable amount of research has compared students whose questioning encouraged them to explore ideas to those students who engaged in teacher-led recitations. The findings consistently favor children who explore literature through discussion. Their discussions tend to be more extensive and of higher quality and complexity (Almasi, 1995; Eeds & Wells, 1989) and they are often more interested in reading and more highly motivated to read (Mathewson, 1985; Ruddell & Unrau, 1997).

Establishing patterns of thought

There is another important but frequently overlooked benefit to using questions that encourage readers to think and discuss ideas. Those discussions and responses permit teachers to observe readers’ thinking habits and skills, the extent of their

TABLE 1
Profiles and instructional interventions

Profile	Description	Interventions
1. Literalists	Look for all answers to all types of questions to be stated in the text.	QAR, QtA, prereading using high-level themes linked to students' experiences
2. Fuzzy Thinkers	Provide vague, ambiguous, or trite responses.	Story maps, classification and concept sorts, semantic feature analysis, think-alouds, Venn diagrams
3. Left Fielders	Generate unpredictable ideas that seem to have no real connection to the text.	Story structure activities, think-alouds, context clues, detecting relationships, classification, Induced Imagery
4. Quiz Contestants	Provide answers that are logically correct but disconnected from the text.	QAR, Anticipation Guides, enumeration maps, concept mapping, classification, multiple-choice test-taking skills
5. Politicians	Use slogans or platitudes that sound meaningful but are not text connected.	Modeling and think-alouds, story structure activities, Venn diagrams, Discussion Webs
6. Dodgers	Change the question and then respond to the new one.	QAR vocabulary development, List-Group-Label, plot-relationship charts, prediction modeling, sensory imaging
7. Authors	Create their own story lines and story details.	Story Impressions, Discussion Webs, literature circles, high-level theme-based prereading
8. Minimalists	Provide no elaboration of responses, resulting from lack of confidence or fear of failure.	Classroom environment that is safe and supportive, student journaling, dialogue journals, QtA, Sketch to Stretch

background knowledge, and the ways that they use that background when they read. They enable teachers to identify obstacles to clearer and more sophisticated thinking, and ultimately make it possible to adjust instruction to meet the needs of students.

The subjects in this inquiry were more than 300 students ranging from first grade through senior high school, who represented a full spectrum of student characteristics, including representatives from urban, suburban, and private schools; varying socioeconomic levels; and all levels of reading achievement. In specific, they were students whom more than 150 graduate reading students selected for the administration of *The Critical Reading Inventory* (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2004) as part of their requirements in a reading assessment course. The authors analyzed thousands of these students' responses to questions that required them to think about, react to, and respond to text. As a

consequence of that analysis, we identified eight distinct profiles of comprehension that we believe shed considerable light on the pitfalls that readers can encounter on their way to thoughtful literacy (see Table 1). We must emphasize, however, that in order to elicit such patterns of thinking, it is necessary to ask questions that require students to think about ideas, not simply to recall text details.

Before we attempt to identify specific profiles of comprehension, it is important that we share our guidelines for the use of the profiles. The first and most important of these is that we can only establish a reader profile by observing a pattern of responses. All readers are capable of responses that are wildly incorrect; it is only a pattern of responses that establishes for us enough assessment information to guide our instructional decision making. The second major consideration is that some students may exhibit the characteristics of more than

one profile. You need not be concerned that your classification of any given response is absolutely precise. You will find that the types of instruction we suggest for various profiles overlap as well, depending on the needs demonstrated.

We must emphasize that the profiles are not intended to be used as labels for students. Our immediate goal in describing thinkers is to increase teacher awareness of the different cognitive approaches students may evidence as they discuss what they have read. Our ultimate objective in considering profiles is to identify the student's view of reading, or what that student thinks reading is supposed to be, and then to provide instruction that helps them to adjust that view when necessary. You will undoubtedly recognize from your classroom experiences many of the types of thinkers that we describe in the profiles in comprehension. But one final admonition is in order: Before we are tempted to poke gentle fun at the students who demonstrate the kinds of thinking errors illustrated in the profiles, we might do well to think of the profiles as a mirror as well as a description. Let the reader who has never engaged in any of the types of thinking we describe be the one to cast the first stone.

Reading sample

In order to illustrate the range of responses to teacher questions, we will use a sample narrative passage reprinted from *The Critical Reading Inventory* (see Figure 1), a tool that assesses comprehension by asking students to respond to three different kinds of items. Text-based items require the reader to recall information stated or strongly suggested in the text. Inference items require readers to link personal experience with the text to arrive at logical conclusions. Critical response items ask readers to discuss the underlying significance of the text and may require them to state and defend their thinking about the text. It is the responses to the latter two types of items that contributed to the development of the profiles. We also need to emphasize that the use of an informal reading inventory is only one way to identify reader profiles. The daily give-and-take of thoughtful classroom discussions, coupled with careful observation and anecdotal notes, will always be far superior to the

snapshot of comprehension habits revealed by any reading inventory.

Profiles in comprehension

1. Literalists

The Literalist clings to the fundamental belief that all answers to all questions will ultimately be found in the text. Literalists appear to have internalized the notion that the author is the ultimate authority on all issues discussed in the text and that the reader's thoughts and reactions are of little consequence. Literalists find it very difficult to distinguish between questions that require them to think and those that require them to seek information. They will approach every question with a more or less systematic search of either their memories or the text in an attempt to locate answers. Literalists will frequently refer to "what the story said" in their responses or explanations. They often respond to thought-provoking questions with statements such as "I don't remember that part" or "It didn't say anything about that," occasionally with considerable indignation that you would break the unspoken rules and ask a question that cannot be answered on the basis of pure recall.

One Literalist we observed was asked, "Who do you think was older, Juan or Maria?" She responded with, "Juan, because it says he is." Another Literalist responded to the same question with, "I must have missed that." The first reader's memory failed her, leading to an inaccurate recall of the story, and the second reader simply expressed the belief that his memory had failed him. What is clear is that both readers are looking to the text for a response to a question that requires them to use information from the text as a spur to their thinking about the characters. They have, in short, developed a distorted view of the very nature of reading.

Interventions. Many Literalists have become what they are because of consistent earlier experiences with text-based classroom questioning. These students will often catch on quickly when they are placed in a classroom where the teacher expects much more than recall. Other cases are a bit more stubborn. Some Literalists will experience persistent difficulties distinguishing between the different

FIGURE 1
The Vacation

Juan burst into his sister's room. "Only eight more days!" he shouted.
"I started packing already!" said Maria. "I can't wait to see what Florida is like."
Juan and Maria had started every day for the last two weeks talking about their Florida vacation. Mom and Dad were just as eager as they were.
But that evening, Father walked into the house, looking like a ghost. "What's wrong?" Mother asked.
"No more overtime for the rest of the year," he stammered. Mother knew that they were going to use the overtime money to pay for the hotel rooms and the plane tickets to Florida. This was their first family vacation!
Mr. Ruiz struggled as he told the children that they would have to cancel their vacation. Juan ran up to his room crying while Maria hugged her father and sobbed.
"Let me see what I can do," said Mrs. Ruiz as she left the room.
She was smiling from ear to ear when she returned. "I just spoke with my brother Sal and he said that we could use his van to drive to Florida and we can stay with his wife's sister!"
Maria was excited with the news but Juan was angry! That wasn't the fun vacation he had been dreaming of for weeks. He had never flown on an airplane and he had never stayed in a hotel.
During the trip, the family stopped to look at different sights along the way. But every time Juan refused to leave the van. He was irritated with their jabbering about what they had seen at each stop.
The following day, Juan again sat in the van while the others went out to see a nearby river. Suddenly, Maria came rushing back to the van. "Juan! Juan!" she called, "Hurry, there's an alligator!" Juan jumped out of the van and dashed the quarter mile to where his parents were standing.
"You missed it," said his father sadly. "It's gone!"
Maria, Mom and Dad told Juan how they first saw the alligator sunning itself on the bank of the river. Maria had quietly run back to get Juan but a squawking bird startled the alligator and it dashed into the river.
Everyone saw how disgusted Juan was and no one said a word for over twenty minutes.
"You know, Juan..." began Mother.
"I know, Mom," said Juan. "I've been missing one of the best chances I've ever had! But I won't do it again!"

Note. From Applegate, Quinn, and Applegate, 2004, p. 170. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, USA.

kinds of questions that teachers may ask and the different mental demands of each. These students often respond well to Question–Answer Relationship (QAR) instruction (Raphael, 1982) and quickly internalize the semantic and syntactic markers that identify different question types. Other Literalists require a full-scale realignment of their view of reading. In these cases, as in so many of the profiles, prereading activities are crucial. For this type, teachers need to allocate a reasonable amount of time discussing and recording student experiences and ideas about themes that are reflected in the text that they are about to read. Many teachers find the prereading planning outlined in strategies such as Questioning the Author (QtA) very useful (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997). The objective is to help children realize that literature consists of stories about life and that these stories almost always deal with themes that they have experienced in their own lives. It is at that point that they can realize that their own ideas and responses to stories

are of paramount importance. Often that realization is enough to put them on the road to a fundamental alteration of their entire concept of and approach to reading.

A final point about Literalists is in order. Accomplished Literalists are often the very types of students who are viewed by teachers as exemplary readers because they recall all or most of what they have read. And equally often these same teachers are stunned by the poor performance of Literalists on standardized tests of reading comprehension that focus less and less on literal reading at higher grade levels.

2. Fuzzy Thinkers

Fuzzy Thinkers are characterized by their vague and imprecise concepts that are frequently reflected in vague and imprecise language. Fuzzy Thinkers can give you an answer to any type of question you ask, but the thinking behind their

responses will be elusive and ambiguous. When we follow up on their initial responses with questions designed to clarify their thinking, we find that they are often unable to explain what they meant. In general, they cannot explain because they never had a clear idea of the significance of their original answer. Frequent use of trite descriptors such as *happy, sad, nice, mean, or good* is often an indicator of the Fuzzy Thinker.

When asked what reason Juan would have for being upset when his family talked about what they had seen, one Fuzzy Thinker responded, "Juan felt sad." No amount of discussion or questioning could entice that reader to explain what Juan had to feel sad about. When asked why Mrs. Ruiz hadn't asked her brother earlier if they could borrow his van, another Fuzzy Thinker replied, "Because they were upset." She missed the point that Mrs. Ruiz asked *because* the family was upset; no one had any reason to be upset earlier.

Interventions. Fuzzy Thinkers are frequently confused when confronted with a question that requires thinking. For that reason, they often require intensive instruction. That instruction should include regular use of story maps (see Beck & McKeown, 1981) that illustrate the logical relationships between the events in a story. Maps can also be used as a way of helping Fuzzy Thinkers organize their retellings as well as their written response to stories. It would not be wise to overlook vocabulary development in the instruction of Fuzzy Thinkers. Often their thinking is fuzzy because they have neither the language facility nor the right words to express their ideas. Practice in classifying words on Word Walls (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) that can be used to describe certain characters can often help to build a repertoire of vocabulary that illustrates the nuances of language that express gradations of thought. Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston (2004) used the term "concept sorts" to describe sorting activities that can strengthen the link between daily home experiences and experiences in the classroom.

Another strategy that can enhance precision in thinking is the use of Semantic Feature Analysis grids (Johnson & Pearson, 1984). These grids use characters from stories in the columns and character traits in the rows. Students complete the grid

individually, deciding whether a character from a story has demonstrated a particular trait. Then members of a small group discuss differences in ratings, using ideas from the story as support for their opinions. Some judicious placement of higher achieving students in various groups can provide very effective peer modeling for Fuzzy Thinkers, while still challenging the more advanced thinkers.

Collaborative development of Venn diagrams designed to help readers explore commonalities among story elements or characters also sets the stage for helping Fuzzy Thinkers make text-to-text and text-to-self connections. It can also strengthen the reader's sensitivity to the power of story structure and can actually force a higher level of precision in thinking. Initial teacher modeling of thought processes should be designed to lead to gradual release of responsibility (Pearson, 1985) to the students and ultimately, to a level of independence. In this same vein, Think-Alouds (Davey, 1983) can help Fuzzy Thinkers adopt a greater emphasis on meaning making in their approach to reading.

3. Left Fielders

Left Fielders are so named because of their unpredictable responses. They seem to have little or no idea that they have just read a coherent piece of text. Their responses will frequently have nothing whatever to do with the text and may even seem incoherent or illogical. But Left Fielders often deliver these responses with remarkable confidence and assurance and may even elaborate upon them at great length when asked to do so. The essence of Left Fielders is that they seem to believe that any answer will serve in response to any question. They differ from those readers who make a personal, idiosyncratic link with the text that others cannot easily understand. These readers can explain their thinking about the text; Left Fielders have a great deal of difficulty doing so.

When asked why Juan would be upset when his family talked about what they had seen, one Left Fielder responded, "Because they had been packing for two weeks." When asked how the family showed that they cared about Juan's feelings after he missed seeing the alligator, another responded with, "They didn't tell him what they were doing." The first reader's response seemed totally irrelevant to the issue, and the second reader's response directly contradicts the passage content.

Interventions. Left Fielders often fail to detect logical relationships between and among ideas in text. Consequently, they can benefit from the use of story maps that focus their attention on the key ideas in the text. When maps are used as guideposts that require readers to identify, for example, the central character, the problem that character experienced, and the steps the character took to solve it, they give Left Fielders a structure into which they can fit information from the text.

Left Fielders generally respond well to teacher modeling during prereading, particularly when teachers focus on relationships between ideas that are triggered by syntactic clues. That modeling might include statements such as, “When I read *because of that*, I have to think of two ideas at the same time; I have to think back to the idea the word *that* stands for, and then I have to expect that the author is going to let me know about its result.” Modeling can also help students detect the location of key syntactic clues and how these affect the story sequence. For example, “I see the word *before* is the first word of this sentence so I expect that the idea I read about first actually happens later; and that means that the idea that I read last in the sentence will be the one that happened first.” Left Fielders could also benefit from guided practice activities that develop sensitivity to a wide range of relational clues.

Another opportunity for guiding Left Fielders in detecting logical relationships occurs during small-group, purposeful oral rereading. After the themes of the story have been discussed, students can be asked to locate and read specific text parts that support the inferences or judgments reported during the discussion. Another small-group discussion activity that will help develop greater clarity and precision in thinking is classification based on character analysis. For example, students could be directed to the text to identify evidence of insight on the part of characters, evidence of the active or passive nature of characters, or accidental problems that confront characters. Left Fielders are likely to respond well to Induced Imagery (Gambrell, Kapinus, & Wilson, 1987) as a way to draw them into the text and focus their attention on key text concepts. As part of this technique, teachers first model the use of mental imagery in response to descriptive text. Afterward, they ask their students to generate their own images and

share and discuss them with others. Finally, a very effective strategy with Left Fielders is to ask them how they know, on the basis of what they have just read, that what they have said is accurate (Richards & Anderson, 2003).

4. Quiz Contestants

Quiz Contestants respond to questions about text by searching their memory banks for an explanation that will serve as a plausible response. The difficulty is that before they begin their memory search, they disconnect from the text that they have just read. Thus Quiz Contestants use their background experiences but they do so with no consideration of the text they have read. Quiz Contestants are somewhat related to Left Fielders in their disconnection from the text, but they differ significantly in that they feel compelled to provide a logical explanation of, for example, a character’s motivation. In that sense their view of reading is more accurate than that of the Left Fielder; they are monitoring their responses to ensure that they are logical. The problem is that they believe that their task is to provide a plausible answer to a question without using the details the author has provided as a guide to their thinking.

When asked why Mrs. Ruiz hadn’t asked her brother earlier if they could borrow the van, one Quiz Contestant replied, “Maybe he was traveling and she didn’t know where he was.” That would certainly explain an inability to contact him, but there is nothing in the text to suggest that this was the case. Another Quiz Contestant replied to the same question, “She didn’t want to bother him.” Again this is a plausible reason for not calling, but it ignores the actual details of the story. Quiz Contestants only seek an answer and do not realize that there must be a link between the text and their experience.

Interventions. Quiz Contestants can be fascinating cases because their responses to questions are so often creative and thoughtful. But they need a great deal of teacher modeling during postreading discussions where the teacher demonstrates a need to use information in the text to limit or frame explanations of a character’s actions.

Certainly QAR can be incorporated into this type of modeling, because questions themselves must act as delimiters that focus a reader’s ideas

on what is plausible in light of a situation described in the text. To prepare Quiz Contestants for more clearly focused thinking, many teachers have found the Anticipation Guide as described by Readence, Bean, and Baldwin (1998) to be very effective. Quiz Contestants also benefit from guided practice with enumeration mapping activities in which they must identify clear support from the text for main ideas presented in map form.

Many types of concept mapping activities and classification tasks can provide opportunities for increasing clarity in an awareness of relationships between ideas. Even instruction in test-taking skills can be beneficial to Quiz Contestants. Distractors in standardized multiple-choice tests are incorrect because they sound logical but have little or nothing to do with the text. Helping students to identify such distractors can be very effective, so long as we encourage them to apply the skill in more authentic reading. And an increase in test scores may be a welcome consequence as well.

5. Politicians

In response to a comprehension question, Politicians will do their best to tell you what they think you want to hear. Politicians will frequently cite slogans or platitudes that sound meaningful but that have rather tenuous connections to the underlying themes of the text they have read. It sometimes seems that the objective of Politicians is to convince you that they can think profoundly on issues, but when you ask them to explain what they mean, they are often unable to explain with clarity.

A Politician was asked what lesson she thought Juan could learn from his experience, and she replied, "You should always listen to your parents." Another Politician, in response to the same question, replied, "If you try your best, you should be happy." In either case, the aphorisms had very little connection to the underlying themes of the story itself.

Interventions. Politicians often produce profound-sounding clichés in an attempt to mask a very limited understanding of the situation. They can often benefit from small-group comprehension strategy instruction, particularly where the teacher models the use of details from the text that support major ideas in the story. In the same vein, postreading activities that

encourage Politicians to rely on story elements to support their responses can be very beneficial.

Because Politicians often have limited comprehension of text elements, they can benefit from any strategy that focuses their attention on text structure. Anticipation Guides or advance organizers that focus attention on key story elements often help Politicians. Politicians also can benefit from the use of Venn diagrams comparing and contrasting key characters; this strategy enhances precision in character and text awareness. Finally, Discussion Webs (Alvermann, 1991) that force readers to think about and draw conclusions by looking at both sides of an issue can help Politicians develop a greater level of text awareness and organization.

6. Dodgers

Dodgers are those readers who evaluate the comprehension question itself. If it is not to their liking, they will change the question into one that they feel is more suitable and then respond to the new question. Dodgers are often very voluble in their responses, hoping that, awash in the flood of verbiage, teachers will not notice that their question has also been washed away. Dodgers are often creative in their efforts to avoid questions that they cannot answer and have been known to paraphrase the question and try to pass it off as a valid answer.

Less sophisticated Dodgers may miss the point of the question because they have misunderstood or misinterpreted it in the first place. Others may have little or no realization of the role of the question in setting up the parameters of the reader's thinking.

When asked why Juan would be upset when his family talked about what they had seen, one Dodger replied, "He was really mad because they talked about all the fun they had." It is not until we analyze the response that we realize that the reader has simply repeated the question in declarative rather than interrogative form. Another Dodger replied to the same question, "Juan's family was just so happy to be going to Florida that they were all excited and talked a lot."

Interventions. Like Politicians, Dodgers are often masking inadequate comprehension of the text and so they benefit from many of the same teaching strategies. A natural instructional choice for the Dodger is QAR, but Dodgers also tend to respond

well to the List-Group-Label strategy (Taba, 1967). This strategy begins with brainstorming and requires students to sort the brainstormed word list into several groups and then to analyze the components of these groups and identify a label for the category. Younger Dodgers often benefit from the use of a plot-relationship chart that forces students to see the connections among four story dimensions: a character, a desired action or goal, the problem or obstacle to the goal, and the solution.

Dodgers can benefit from teacher predictions based on themes that help them make personal connections to the text, and especially from predictions that must be altered because of the information that unfolds in the text. This strategy is particularly important because it demonstrates the power of the question in framing the responses of the reader. Teachers can also model the use of sensory images with literature selections and demonstrate the powerful connection between the images they create and the language used by the writer.

7. Authors

Authors are those readers who, dissatisfied with the literary content of what they have read, add more to it, often at great length and with much confidence. Authors may create entire story lines that have only minimal relevance to what they have read. When they are questioned, they frequently show remarkable consistency by using their revised “text” as the basis for their responses. Authors sometimes seem to be embarrassed by the fact that they have not comprehended what they have read and they attempt to compensate by elaborating upon the few details that they do recall.

When asked why Juan might be upset when his family talked about what they had seen, one Author responded, “All he wanted to do was get to Florida and he didn’t care how he got there. His little sister was following him around and bothering him the whole time and that’s why he didn’t want to stay in the van.” Another Author responded to the same question, “He was sick and his family had to stay with him and take care of him and that’s why they couldn’t see all the things on their trip.”

Interventions. One strategy that directly addresses the Author’s orientation toward reading is Story Impressions (McGinley & Denner, 1987). In this

strategy, students are given a list of words or phrases from a story and asked to use them in the creation of their own story. After they have read the book, they are asked to compare and contrast their predicted story with the actual story. Not only does this activity force students to attend to the ideas of the author, but also it calls attention to the writer’s craft and generates discussion as to why the author included certain story elements in the book. Authors also benefit from Discussion Webs because they are required to interpret the story from one perspective and listen to a peer’s interpretation from the opposite perspective. The key for success with Discussion Webs is the ability of the teacher to create open-ended, higher level questions that are based on a “pro and con” structure.

Arguably the most effective strategy for Authors is the use of literature circles that require participants to address high-level questions and issues. This instruction is particularly effective when Authors are grouped with students who have demonstrated strength in responding to stories by clearly focusing on issues related to the text.

8. Minimalists

Minimalists are characterized by their simple and unelaborated responses to even the most complex of questions. Minimalists are usually reluctant to elucidate their responses or explain their thinking. When asked by the teacher to do so, they frequently respond with “I don’t know” or “That’s all I can think of” or with complete silence. The difficulty with Minimalists (and the source of much teacher frustration) is that some elements of their responses may be correct. The problem is that they leave it to the questioners to connect the dots and fill in any logical gaps that may exist. Thus, Minimalists are difficult to instruct because they give us so little to work with in our attempts to unearth their underlying patterns of thinking. They are further complicated by the fact that they may be of two distinct types.

Type A Minimalists refuse to elaborate because they have little or no confidence in their language skills. Teachers can find Type A Minimalists enormously frustrating because they suspect that these children are capable of much more effective thinking. Indeed, Minimalists differ from Fuzzy Thinkers in that they may show us tantalizing

glimpses of their ability to think clearly and articulate that thinking. But their unwillingness to elucidate their responses is rooted in the fear that they will “say the wrong things” or “say the things wrong.” When asked if she thought Juan’s parents were right for letting him sulk for so long, one Minimalist replied, “Yes. They shouldn’t interfere.” It is difficult to determine on the basis of so little whether the reader was thinking deeply or responding superficially. Unfortunately, she could not explain what she meant and seemed embarrassed and uncomfortable when the examiner tried to probe for more information. As a consequence, we can never know what she really intended.

Type B Minimalists have a profound fear of being wrong. They have somehow internalized the notion that education is all about “getting it right” and getting it right the first time. Type B Minimalists often fidget or show varying signs of anxiety when they are faced with questions about what they have read and will be very uncomfortable or frustrated if they believe that their responses are wrong. One Type B Minimalist followed almost every terse response with the question, “Did I get that right?” Never was there evidence that this reader was engaged in self-monitoring for comprehension of the text. Another responded to numerous Critical Response items with complete silence, unable to even say aloud the words, “I don’t know.”

Interventions. It will come as no surprise to experienced teachers that one of the paramount considerations in the case of Minimalists is the establishment of a safe and supportive classroom environment that encourages and celebrates the contribution of all students. Student journals can often draw out of Minimalists what we will never hear from their lips. There are, of course, learning response or reaction journals, but the form most likely to yield results with Minimalists is the dialogue journal, which enables individualized contact between teacher and learner. Staton (1987) provided some wise guidelines for teachers in establishing the level of mutual trust necessary to draw out the Minimalist.

Most Minimalists benefit from prereading strategies that encourage links between their own thinking and experience and that of the author. Strategies such as QtA and advance organizers that require students to go beyond the literal details of the text can be particularly effective. A strategy

such as Sketch to Stretch (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988) can also assure Minimalists that there are many ways to express interpretations of text. And in Sketch to Stretch, it is the interpretation of text that is central, not artistic talent.

Effective comprehension instruction must be matched to the reader

If anything at all is evident from our analysis of student responses, it is the power of the higher level question as a tool for identifying habits of reading and thinking that merit our attention as teachers. If we can remove some of the obstacles to thoughtful literacy that our students experience, it stands to reason that we can offer them more opportunities for engaged reading. It is important to note that many of the strategies that seem to match well with particular profiles in comprehension are well tested. The keys to effective instruction lie in the teacher’s keen observational skills and the expansion of teaching repertoires to directly address the needs of students.

It must be equally clear that thoughtful reactions to text are more than simply mechanisms to sort out good readers from poor readers. The sheer number of strategies that exist in the professional literature (and we have referenced only a minimum) should convince us that we have the tools to teach almost all students to respond thoughtfully to what they read. Well-timed and well-executed lessons from teaching professionals who are themselves thoughtful readers is often all it takes to begin the process of altering the fundamental view of reading that children hold. When we can match the reading profiles of our students with the instruction they need, we can put our children firmly on the road to effective, rewarding, and engaged reading throughout their entire lives.

Mary DeKonty Applegate teaches at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She may be contacted there (Education Department, Saint Joseph’s University, 5600 City Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131-1395, USA). E-mail mapple1492@aol.com. Quinn and Anthony Applegate teach at Holy Family University in Philadelphia.

References

- Almasi, J.F. (1995). The nature of fourth graders' sociocognitive conflicts in peer-led and teacher-led discussions of literature. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*, 314-351.
- Almasi, J.F., & Gambrell, L.B. (1994). *Sociocognitive conflict in peer-led and teacher-led discussion of literature* (Research Rep. 12). College Park, MD; Athens, GA: Universities of Maryland and Georgia, National Reading Research Center.
- Alvermann, D.E. (1991). The Discussion Web: A graphic aid for learning across the curriculum. *The Reading Teacher, 45*, 92-99.
- Applegate, M.D., Quinn, K.B., & Applegate, A.J. (2002). Levels of thinking required by comprehension questions in informal reading inventories. *The Reading Teacher, 56*, 174-180.
- Applegate, M.D., Quinn, K.B., & Applegate, A.J. (2004). *The critical reading inventory*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Barr, R., & Dreeben, R. (1991). Grouping students for reading instruction. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, & P.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 885-910). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Bear, D.R., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2004). *Words their way: Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Beck, I.L., & McKeown, M.G. (1981). Developing questions that promote comprehension: The story map. *Language Arts, 58*, 913-918.
- Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., Hamilton, R.L., & Kucan, L. (1997). *Questioning the Author: An approach for enhancing student engagement with text*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Cazden, C.B. (1986). Classroom discourse. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 432-463). New York: Macmillan.
- Cunningham, P.M., & Allington, R.L. (2003). *Classrooms that work: They can all read and write* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Davey, B. (1983). Think-aloud—Modeling the cognitive processes of reading comprehension. *Journal of Reading, 27*, 44-47.
- Dickinson, D.K., & Smith, M.W. (1994). Long-term effects of preschool teachers' book readings on low-income children's vocabulary and story comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly, 29*, 104-122.
- Durkin, D. (1979). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 15*, 481-533.
- Eeds, M., & Wells, D. (1989). Grand conversations: An exploration of meaning construction in literature study groups. *Research in the Teaching of English, 23*, 4-29.
- Gambrell, L.B., Kapinus, B.A., & Wilson, R.M. (1987). Using mental imagery and summarization to achieve independence in comprehension. *Journal of Reading, 30*, 638-642.
- Goldenberg, C. (1992). Instructional conversations: Promoting comprehension through discussions. *The Reading Teacher, 46*, 316-326.
- Guthrie, J.T., Schafer, W.D., Wang, Y.Y., & Afflerbach, P.P. (1995). Influences of instruction on reading engagement: An empirical exploration of a social-cognitive framework of reading activity. *Reading Research Quarterly, 30*, 8-25.
- Harste, J., Short, C., & Burke, C. (1988). *Creating classrooms for authors*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Johnson, D.D., & Pearson, P.D. (1984). *Teaching reading vocabulary* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Langer, J.A. (1992). Rethinking literature instruction. In J.A. Langer (Ed.), *Literature instruction: A focus on student response* (pp. 35-53). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Mathewson, G.C. (1985). Toward a comprehensive model of affect in the reading process. In H. Singer & R.B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (3rd ed., pp. 841-857). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- McGinley, W.J., & Denner, P.R. (1987). Story impressions: A prereading/writing activity. *Journal of Reading, 31*, 248-253.
- Pearson, P.D. (1985). Changing the face of reading comprehension instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 38*, 724-738.
- Pearson, P.D., & Fielding, L. (1991). Comprehension instruction. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 815-860). New York: Longman.
- Raphael, T. (1982). Question-answering strategies for children. *The Reading Teacher, 36*, 186-190.
- Readence, J.E., Bean, T.W., & Baldwin, R.S. (1998). *Content area reading: An integrated approach* (6th ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Richards, J.C., & Anderson, N.A. (2003). How do you know? A strategy to help emergent readers make inferences. *The Reading Teacher, 57*, 290-293.
- Ruddell, R.B. (2001). *Teaching children to read and write: Becoming an effective literacy teacher* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ruddell, R.B., & Unrau, N.J. (1997). The role of responsive teaching in focusing reader intention and developing reader motivation. In J.T. Guthrie & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Reading engagement: Motivating readers through integrated instruction* (pp. 102-125). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Staton, J. (1987). The power of responding in dialogue journals. In T. Fulwiler (Ed.), *The journal book* (pp. 47-63). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Taba, H. (1967). *Teacher's handbook for elementary social studies*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Higher Education.
- Tierney, R.J., & Readence, J.E. (2004). *Reading strategies and practices: A compendium* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.