READ SMARTER, NOT HARDER: IMPLEMENTING COMPREHENSION MONITORING TO IMPROVE CRITICAL READING

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Abstract

This qualitative action research study shares the experiences of students and their teacher when comprehension monitoring was implemented in a Reading Intervention class. Eighteen eleventh grade students participated in the study in an urban high school containing approximately 3000 students in the northeastern United States. Methods of gathering data included teacher observations, artifacts, surveys, formal and informal interviews, and student reflective journals. Methods of analysis included review of student work, various reflective memos, review of educational philosophers, coding, and the creation of theme statements. Students were taught specific strategies to monitor comprehension including: setting a purpose, utilizing text features, questioning, paraphrasing, evaluating bias, and critical analysis. Students practiced comprehension monitoring with various text genres: short fiction stories, non-fiction editorials, newspaper articles, a memoir, and standardized tests. Findings suggest teachers must routinely provide ample and continuous scaffolding for comprehension monitoring. In addition, comprehension monitoring improves reading stamina by increasing awareness of distractions. The creation of a comprehension portfolio allows students to reflect upon their growth as a reader over a period of time. Furthermore, continuous comprehension monitoring enhances engagement, discussion, and evaluation.
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Researcher Stance

The following is an all-too-frequent interaction with students.

Me: “Ok. Now that you have read this passage, I would like you to tell me what you thought about or noticed while you were reading?”

Student: “Ummm...nothing”

Me: “Can you tell me what the article was about?”

Student: “Um...No.”

Me: “Ok. Where specifically did your thinking break down?”

Student: “Um...I don’t know”

Me: “What did you try to do to stay focused?”

Student: “Nothing.”

During my tenure as a high school teacher, I have had this conversation, or one very similar, with far too many students. As a ninth grade teacher, I regularly interviewed my new students about their current reading practices. I figured since they were just entering high school that they might struggle with reading comprehension and lack reading stamina. I knew that it was my job to teach them the strategies they needed to become successful, metacognitive thinkers.

Never in my wildest teacher-dreams did I imagine that eleventh graders would share these same problems, I was shocked. Sure, I have heard eleventh grade teachers complain that students lacked sophisticated thinking, but I at least thought that they could comprehend basic elements of the text. Well, my sheltered
little teacher-world, came crashing down this year when I started working with small groups of students as a literacy coach. I was charged with the mission of helping 37 students who had scored basic or below on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). I knew it would be a challenge, but I had no idea how much of a challenge until I completed my first round of student interviews. Most students admitted that they did nothing active while they were reading except, perhaps, trying to get to the bottom of the page as quickly as possible. I was seriously shocked. What happened to all of those reading strategies they were taught in ninth grade? Where did their knowledge of text structure and the tenets of active reading go?

After this discouraging, disheartening, and devastating discovery, I invited some of the eleventh grade students I had taught in ninth grade for a second interview. I asked them if they remembered the strategies they learned in ninth grade. “Yes” was the unanimous response. Whew! At least they remembered! I followed up by asking them why they were no longer using the strategies they were taught in ninth grade. The answers made me cringe:

“We were never told to use them.”

“I thought that was just for ninth grade.”

“I forgot that I should use those.”

“It’s too much work.” I wanted to crawl in the deepest darkest hole and cry. How could they stop using these strategies? Their responses meant that I
would have to face the reality that I hadn’t prepared them for life-long critical reading after ninth grade. I never took the time to teach them to monitor their comprehension. Instead, I had only taught them the strategies they would need.

After 2 years of literacy coaching, I returned to the classroom and was given an eleventh grade class, full of students similar to those that I had interviewed and worked with while literacy coaching. I knew that I wanted students to learn these crucial skills in order to be more successful in English class, in all classes, and in life. It was my job to produce life-long learners, students who have the reading skills necessary to problem-solve, think critically, and inquire about all aspects of life; these were the reasons that I became a teacher in the first place. I wanted to help students retain the big ideas that they would learn in my class and apply them to all of the other learning experiences they would have in high school. In order to do this, I needed to start teaching students “how” to learn when a teacher was not standing over them and reminding them to talk-to-the-text, use fix-ups, annotate, etc. I needed to teach them how to monitor their comprehension.

I eventually realized what I really wanted students to be able to do was decide how and when to use the strategies they had been taught to use without being told to do so; this can only be done by teaching them to formatively assess their own understanding of texts. Formative assessments serve as a check for
understanding for both teachers and students. It allows both partners in education to evaluate how well the student grasps a concept during the learning process.

Furthermore, formative assessment really forces students to examine their own learning styles and use them to their advantage. In essence, they will begin to monitor their own progress and begin to understand “how” they learn and “why” they learn. These two essential pieces of comprehension are crucial to life-long learning. There are obviously many types of formative assessment that are beneficial to student learning, but my passion really lies in the realm of comprehension monitoring. It uniquely combines my love for reading and dissecting texts with taking ownership in the learning process. I want students to learn self-monitoring skills that will engage them in the learning process and motivate them to succeed in school. This metacognitive approach to reading makes reading come alive for students, as they question the text, make connections, develop inferences, and challenge the author. I want to teach them to monitor themselves so that they are (and view themselves as) successful.

My painful discovery that students fail to monitor their comprehension regularly while reading, in combination with my appreciation for formative assessment, led me to my research question: What are the observed and reported experiences of students and their teacher when comprehension monitoring is implemented in an eleventh grade Remedial Reading class? It is by no means a super-complex or unanswerable question; in fact, it is a simple and necessary
question that must be asked. I strongly believe that comprehension monitoring will, in fact, significantly improve students’ reading comprehension. I have had several experiences that have led me to this conclusion. For example, when taking *Teacher as Researcher*, I conducted a mini-study on vocabulary acquisition among 11th grade geometry students. Throughout this study, I taught students metacognitive strategies to improve their understanding of essential vocabulary. One of the most successful strategies (as determined by the students) was the self-evaluation chart. On this chart, students had to determine how comfortable they were with important key words at stages of the learning process. The students appreciated this chart because it helped them to track their learning progress, and more importantly, it served as a reality check for their current understanding before major assessments.

Another experience that has helped me come to the conclusion that comprehension monitoring will significantly improve the reading comprehension of my students is the implementation of metacognitive logs. When I taught ninth grade Critical Literacy, I had students read independent novels. After each reading, students had to comment in their metacognitive logs, using provided stem starters, about what they had read. I frequently surveyed the students about their use of the logs and how the log entries helped them. The students commented that because they knew they were going to have to write something in the logs, they were more focused on their reading. Some students also commented
that they liked the logs because I responded to them. I believe that they appreciated the feedback. Due to this, I plan to provide frequent feedback during my study to students through interviews.

Furthermore, my ninth grade students were very fond of fix-up bookmarks. These bookmarks had ideas/strategies for students to use if their thinking broke down during reading. The bookmark had suggestions like “re-read,” “start with what you do know,” or “use the graphs.” These little reminders helped students to forge on through difficult texts, while staying active in the metacognitive realm. These small reminders created the basis for my Comprehension Monitoring Checklists that I will be using throughout my study.

Since the first day I stepped foot in a classroom, I have wanted students to be successful readers, successful students, and successful life-long learners. By teaching my students how to help themselves learn, I hope to provide them with the keys to be confident and capable readers.
Review of the Literature

Introduction: The Need to Read

The number of students who leave high school lacking the literacy skills necessary for success in the workplace or college is becoming increasingly more alarming. Whether they are meant to be college and/or career ready, too many students simply do not have a solid foundation to comprehend what they read. According to the ACT (2005), less than 32 percent of graduates will be ready for introductory level English courses at the college level after completing four years of a high school education. Additionally, Achieve Incorporated (2005) discovered that 40 percent of graduates are not prepared with literacy skills for the workforce.

The problem may appear initially simple: American students need to learn to read. In reality, it is much more complex. For generations, teachers, researchers, psychologists, and others have tried various approaches to solving the reading problem. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) discovered that the complexity of the reading crisis is that “students experience a wide range of challenges that require an equally wide range of interventions” (p. 8). This clearly addresses the issue that there are many components of reading that can cause struggles for different readers: decoding, fluency, comprehension, analysis, and evaluation, among others. Furthermore, this wide range of reading challenges may be present within one class, and it is clear that no two students are exactly alike in terms of
reading processes and difficulties (Fox, 2009; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Booth, 2002). With so many students struggling with so many facets of comprehension, the thought of helping students learn to read effectively can be daunting. The complexities of teaching reading and meeting the needs of all students at the secondary school level are especially grand. Fortunately, brave researchers, pioneers, and teachers have found best-practices that can aid students with these varying reading levels, including comprehension monitoring.

What is Reading Comprehension?

To understand the practice of comprehension monitoring, it is necessary to first understand the nature of comprehension, as well as the way in which readers learn to comprehend. Reading comprehension can be clearly defined as the active process of reading that helps the reader to discover meaning and relationships within a text (Yang & Yu-Fen, 2002; Fox, 2009; Tarban, Rynearson, & Kerr (2000). When comprehending a text, students need to be able to determine crucial components, such as the main idea, theme, purpose, and context. Strategies such as summarizing, clarifying, predicting, visualizing, and connecting may help students learn to comprehend what they are reading (Beers, 2002).
Metacognition: The Gateway to Comprehension Monitoring

However, using the strategies alone is not enough for students to magically comprehend when reading. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) found that in order for students to be able to use the wealth of strategies they had been taught effectively, they also needed metacognitive knowledge, known more commonly as metacognition (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Flavell, 1981, Yang & Yu-Fen, 2002). Metacognition, literally translated means “thinking about thinking,” as described by West Ed’s Reading Apprenticeship Initiative (Shoenbach et al, 1999). In order for students to comprehend what they are reading, they must think metacognitively, or think about their own thinking, while they are reading. While practicing metacognition and helping students to use comprehension strategies is extremely beneficial to their reading practices, it is not always enough to help all readers be successful with curriculum. Jacobs and Paris (1987), in their extensive research on metacognition discovered that, “metacognition is not a panacea for children’s reading problems and should not be the curriculum. Understanding the processes of thinking while reading is a tool to read more effective and not an end in itself” (p. 255). Through this bold statement, the researchers identify that metacognition cannot create a curriculum, but is rather a crucial vehicle for understanding that curriculum. Instead of teaching about strategies in isolated contexts, researchers have found that teachers needed to weave in the practice of metacognition to
create a thorough understanding of the various curriculum texts (Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Fox, 2009). In essence, what is truly needed is strategic readers, with a solid metacognitive foundation and a wealth of strategies, who can understand how to dissect and utilize a text to find meaning and relationships within a text, course, or the greater goal, life.

**What is comprehension monitoring?**

Although reading strategies are certainly a piece of comprehension monitoring, there is an important distinction between the two terms. Yu-Fen (2006) articulates the difference clearly, noting that, “Reading strategies are those that help readers solve the problems in figuring out meanings of the printed words while comprehension monitoring strategies are those that help readers solve problems beyond the printed word” (p. 337). Comprehension monitoring strategies help students to be both metacognitive about their reading processes, make decisions about a text, and analyze its intricacies. In his research study, Wagoner (1983) attempted to explain how comprehension monitoring is a piece of metacognition. Wagoner (1983) explained comprehension monitoring as “an executive function, essential for competent reading which directs a reader’s cognitive processes as she strives to make sense of incoming information” (p. 328). Such monitoring allows students to effectively use their repertoire of reading strategies to meet the specific needs of the passage (Lorch, Lorch, &
Klusewitz, 1993). Therefore, comprehension monitoring is a process that helps students to select which reading and comprehension strategies are necessary for various texts, helps them to remain focused, and allows them to analyze and evaluate the curriculum to reach essential curricular, cross-curricular and worldly understandings (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Fox, 2009).

**Benefits of Comprehension Monitoring**

**Academic Benefits.** Wiggins (1993) found that “the problem with kids today is that they don’t know what to do when they don’t know what to do” (p. 202). These students are unable to make effective decisions about what to do, while they are reading, when meaning breaks down. For these students, it was not necessarily a lack of strategy knowledge, but more a lack of knowing how to choose a strategy or what to do with it while they are reading. Branch (1998) found that students were much too dependent on the teacher to tell them which reading strategy to use with any given text at any time and lacked the ability to make crucial decisions about what to do when they were stuck. Costa and Kallick (1982), found a similar lack of independence in their study, explaining, “If students graduate high school still dependent upon others to tell them when they are adequate, good, or excellent then we’ve missed the whole point of what education is about” (p. 280). Students who are too reliant on the teacher to make all critical decisions about strategies to use, when to use them, and how to help
themselves are not truly learning anything. Instead, they are being enabled to continue not to think for themselves; this is one of the ills that comprehension monitoring aims to change. Collins and Smith (1982) found that comprehension monitoring helps students to take some kind of “remedial action when [they] are bogged down” (p. 174). Furthermore, Bauman and Jones (1993) found that by providing students with “more opportunities for decision making, [they] are likely to assume ownership and responsibility for their comprehension” (p. 186). All of these researchers discovered that students need to be more self-directed and that the implementation of comprehension monitoring helped these students to reach this goal.

Another benefit of teaching students to monitor their comprehension is the correlation between reading comprehension levels and the practice of comprehension monitoring. Langer (1993), and Steinberg et al. (1991) independently concluded that students’ level of reading was directly related to their conscious use of comprehension monitoring processes. Students who effectively monitored strategy use, set goals while reading, and monitored their focus were stronger readers than those who did not. Taraban, Rynearson, and Kerr (2000) confirm that the students who used comprehension monitoring to plan, read, and then redirect reading for difficulties, were much more skillful; they were more able to identify more conceptual ideas than those who did not practice in comprehension monitoring.
Eme, Puustinen, and Coutelet (2006) discovered that effective comprehension monitoring was a clear prediction of reading comprehension. Through their inquiry process, they noted that “poor comprehenders did not completely fail to evaluate their comprehension, [but] they were less likely to solve inconsistencies” (p. 94). The poor comprehenders in this case did not detect or stop to solve their reading discrepancies. Comprehension monitoring seeks to help readers detect their own problems and clear them up before they create misconceptions that interfere with the meaning making process (Yu-Fen, 2006). Furthermore, when the quality of strategy use is excellent, the benefits for students increases; the students who use the strategies most effectively will likely have the strongest understanding (Barnett, 1998).

**Affective Benefits.** In addition to the striking academic benefits of comprehension monitoring, there are also affective domain benefits that have been discovered for comprehension monitoring. Jitendra, Hoppes, and Xin (2000) found that their implementation and study of comprehension monitoring created students who were more confident about their comprehension abilities. The students, they concluded, had remarkably more positive attitudes at the end of the study than they reported having at the beginning. They noted two particular reasons for the improvement in attitude. First, the knowledge of how to select strategies at necessary times eased their stress level; second, the successful use of
the monitoring led them to more thoughtful and accurate answers (Jitendra et al., 2000). This affective benefit of teaching students to monitor their comprehension can also help the stress level of the teacher, as he/she is not left to do all of the deciding of what strategy to use when for every child (Biancarosa & Snow (2006). In her guide to reading, *I Read It But I Don’t Get It*, Tovani (2000) writes, “for too long, teachers have been expected to monitor every aspect of their students’ comprehension” (p. 9). By shifting some of this responsibility to the student, the teacher can serve as a facilitator of learning and work with individual children on their specific needs.

**Engagement benefits.** Another important aspect of comprehension monitoring is the practice’s ability to help students maintain interest and engagement when reading. When a student can maintain interest with a piece of text, he or she is more likely to comprehend and learn from the text (Alexander, 1997; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999; Pressly & Afflerbach, 1995, Fox, 2009). Readers who are naturally interested in the topic will be more likely to draw stronger conclusion about the text; those who cannot connect to the topic of reading will be more likely to lose interest quickly (Steinke, 1995). One substantial way to help students more readily find connections that will help them invest in texts is building a wealth of prior knowledge, or schema for students (Schoenbach, Grennleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). By building their schema,
students develop a wider content knowledge that they can draw from to better understand what they are reading.

Additionally, Bugel and Buunk (1995) claim that texts are more accessible to students when they match up with “gender-specific” topics (p. 19). Unfortunately, it is not always feasible to pair “gender-specific” or other texts of high interest with students; it is inevitable that students will need to read texts that they are not naturally highly interested in, yet they still need to be engaged during the reading process to ensure comprehension. Comprehension monitoring helps those students who do not initially find interest in a text make the text relevant through activating prior knowledge and goal setting (Fox, 2009). Predictions will continue to keep them interested in the text, as will reflections on their goals. It is important to understand that predictions and goal setting does not come naturally to students. Instead they must be taught how to engage in these practices through teacher modeling, practice, and reflection (Anday-Porter, Henne, & Horan, 2000).

Furthermore, difficult texts can often be disengaging for students. Frederick, (2006) writes, “When students do not comprehend, they are not engaged” (p. 152). Steinke (1995) and Fox et al. (2005) found that readers who struggled with a text and did not have the means to overcome these struggles became quickly disinterested and often did not finish the task. Because comprehension monitoring gives students the tools to overcome obstacles such as text structure, vocabulary, and incomplete explanations, students who use this
practice are likely to be more successful (Fox, 2009). Comprehension monitoring forces students to stay engaged in the reading process whether they are directly interested in the text or not. Kelly and Clausen-Grace (2009) find that this helps “fake readers” to stay focused (p. 314). They contend that the fake readers are those students who pretend to read during any kind of reading time but actually read nothing. Comprehension monitoring has some accountability built into it because students are expected to be able to choose strategies, explain their selections, and identify what they were able to learn because of them (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009). There are many things in life that students will have to read that they will probably not enjoy; therefore, they need the tools to be able to get through these texts and make sense of them accurately.

**Learning Disabled Students.** There has been wealth of research conducted about the response of learning disabled [LD] students to the practice of comprehension monitoring. Vaughn, Levy, and Coleman (2002), contend that approximately 90% of LD students have difficulty reading for comprehension. This is a critical mass of students who struggle with the process or reading. Toberts, Torgeson, Boardman, and Scammacca (2008), determined that students who are labeled LD do not regularly monitor their comprehension or stop where their thinking breaks down.
However, there have been many recent studies that support the use of comprehension monitoring as an aid for improving the comprehension of LD students. Crabtree, Alber-Morgan, & Konrad (2010) found that students who were taught to self-monitor their reading comprehension were more successful. They discovered that the use of self-questioning was the most effective form of monitoring for the participants of his study. Faggella, Luby and Deschler (2007) determined that explicit instruction in the purpose of text structure was most effective for teaching students to monitor their own comprehension. While these two researchers present two different approaches to teaching self-monitoring comprehension, it is clear that LD students do benefit from learning the practice in small pieces. Shimabukuro and Prater (1999) also found that comprehension monitoring improves the attention span of LD students, enabling them to focus more clearly on the reading. They argue that “monitoring of their performance is effective in increasing academic productivity” (p. 397). Likewise, The National Center for Learning Disabilities (1999) contends that comprehension monitoring for LD students is so effective because is forces them not to be passive learners. At the same time, it teaches them how to find the essential information of a text (NCLD, 1999). It is clear that there are potentially phenomenal benefits for LD students, as well as all students, when comprehension monitoring is taught, implemented, and maintained.
Challenges of Comprehension Monitoring

Students. While comprehension monitoring has numerous benefits for students of all reading levels, it is not without its challenges. Like Jacobs and Paris’s (1987) comment that “metacognition is not a panacea for children’s reading problems” (p. 75), comprehension monitoring is not a cure-all either. More explicitly, there are several challenges that can arise when implementing this aspect of metacognition that demands students to take responsibility for their learning. Thiede, Anderson, and Therriault (2003) alert teachers of comprehension monitoring about what can happen if students do not thoroughly understand the process of how to monitor comprehension. Thiede et al. (2003), contend that if students are “left to their own devices [they] will not accurately monitor comprehension during reading” (p. 66). Therefore, teachers need to explicitly teach the processes of how to monitor comprehension. They must show exactly how to use specific reading strategies through direct instruction, modeling, and plenty of practice (Biancarosa and Snow, 2006). Furthermore, the students must be taught how and when to employ “fix up strategies” when navigating through reading obstacles they might encounter (Tovani, 2000). The practice of comprehension monitoring does not develop quickly or immediately; instead, it takes time and practice. In their study of effective reading strategies conducted in the Chicago suburbs, Jacobucci, Richert, Ronan, and Tanis (2002)
concluded that students were more likely to improve their reading comprehension when they were given ample practice time to internalize such strategies.

Another challenge is that some students, even after they believe they have monitored their comprehension, may still be inaccurate. Fox (2009), Casey (1995), and Steinberg, Bohnin, and Chowning (1991) found that many students had incorrect summaries and inferences, and had no idea that they were inaccurate. These students had falsely practiced what they thought was comprehension monitoring. At some point in the process their thinking broke down, and they were not aware of it. Fox’s (2009) findings show that this is an ongoing process, and students need to continually reflect on the accuracy of their understanding. Branch (1998) suggests that to ensure the accuracy of monitoring students need to internalize their processes and reflect on their successes and weaknesses. This practice will help students to “identify their problem areas and set individual goals for improvement (Branch, 1998, p. 64). Campbell et. al confirm this idea that thinking will break down at some point. They contend that teachers use a “Thinking Curriculum,” which values both “process and product” to allow students to be more conscious of their mistakes and help to decrease the number of instances that students come to misconceptions (p. 21).

Yet another challenge to the successful incorporation of the practice of comprehension monitoring is the attention of students. Christopherson, Schultz, and Waern (1981) and Pritchard (1990) found that the focus initially shifted from
the monitoring of actual comprehension to staying focused on the reading. Students at first had to spend most of their efforts on actually decoding rather than constructing meaning. While this is an unavoidable pitfall for early comprehension monitors, students, over time, were able to focus more on constructing meaning later in each study (Fox, 2009). A similar finding was discovered in the case studies of ADHD boys done by Shimabukuro and Prater (1999). They concurred that the self-monitoring of attention will need to be managed before the construction of meaning is present.

**Teachers.** Teachers must have a solid understanding of the pieces that go into teaching comprehension monitoring. Shoenbach, et al., (1999) stress that teachers must learn explicit reading strategies and concepts, as well as understand the reading process. In addition, the teachers need to understand the varying instructional needs of each student in terms of his or her reading ability in order to offer the most effective support (Jitendra, et. al 2000). This requires an extensive knowledge base of the teacher, accompanied with the desire to work hard to help each individual student reach his/her literacy goals through comprehension monitoring.

Because comprehension monitoring can still generate inconsistencies and false assumptions, it is necessary for teachers to again teach comprehension monitoring strategies explicitly. Walraven and Reista (1992) conducted a study of
24 Dutch children and monitored their ability to learn and metacognitively select appropriate strategies. In their conclusions they remarked “the findings obviously indicated that children who received explicit instruction showed an increase in test scores and comprehension” (p. 3). In addition, the teaching of specific skills such as remediation strategies, questioning, predicting using direct instruction, in combination with a process-approach to reading allowed students to be much more successful readers (Walraven & Reista, 1992; Jacobucci, Richert, Ronan, & Tanis, 2002). It becomes apparent that the ultimate solution for the challenges of teaching comprehension monitoring lie in its inherent goal: knowing when to select and utilize specific strategies to understand a text.

**Teaching Comprehension Monitoring**

When teaching students how to monitor their own comprehension, there are many practices that have been found to be useful. These practices can be organized into three dimensions outlined by Jacobs and Paris (1987): planning, evaluation, and regulation. In the planning stage, students learn to set goals for themselves. Students plan how they can attack various types of passages using the strategies they know. In the evaluation stage, students evaluate their metacognitive reading abilities and the understanding of the test. They actively construct meaning using the strategies they know to be most effective. During the third stage, regulation, students might need to reassess their learning, reflect on
the processes they have used, or reflect on their growth as a learner (Jacobs and Paris, 1987). Thiede, Anderson, and Therriault (2003) also note the importance of the three dimensions to academic success, especially self-regulation: “metacognitive monitoring is related to regulation of student, and regulation of study is related to test performance” (p. 66). This undoubtedly shows the strong connection between comprehension monitoring and academic success.

**Goal Setting.** A crucial component of comprehension monitoring is for students to be able to set goals for their learning. There are both short and long-term goals that apply to comprehension monitoring (Arkebauer, MacDonald, & Palmer, 2002; Campbell et. al, 1998). Short term goals relate to individual reading passages and assignments. Students need to set goals in order to reach the end of the passage with successful monitoring and accuracy. Jacobs and Paris (1987) suggest that changing the reading rate is one example of such a goal. Other examples might be focusing on one particular strategy, such as questioning or predicting. Long-term goals in terms of comprehension monitoring aim to improve their thinking over a period of time (Arkebauer et al., 2002, Campbell et. al, 1998). Students need to be able to set and then achieve long-term comprehension goals that will eventually improve their abilities as readers. According to Branch (1998), skilled comprehenders are able to “identify problem areas and set individual goals for [future] improvement” (64). This process of
setting and evaluating goals helps to keep the readers focused on continued success with reading.

**Student interest as motivation.** In addition, readers need to be able to make decisions about how to approach various genres of texts. It behooves teachers to begin the teaching of comprehension monitoring by beginning with texts that students will enjoy. When reading texts that they enjoy, students are more likely to need to plan less, as they will be naturally more inclined to monitor (Fox, Maggiolini, and Riconscente, 2005; Boothe, 2002; Frederick, 2006). They can rely on their interest as the motivator to comprehend the text. Because students are likely be much more receptive to trying comprehension monitoring with a text they enjoy, Crabtree et al. (2010) recommend beginning to teach comprehension monitoring with high interest reading materials. These researchers believe that it is an excellent way to help them see the stages of the process and not become overly frustrated (Crabtree et al, 2010).

Once students become engaged in the monitoring processes, students will need to learn to transfer the process to other, more difficult text (Branch, 1998). The process of transfer can be difficult for many students, even if it is within the same content area. Therefore, Crabtree et al. (2010) recommend using a “transferrable prompt” like a bookmark or card that lists the strategies (p. 202). The process of transferring the comprehension monitoring process from genre to
genre can also be difficult because different types of texts demand different strategies and fix-ups (Tovani, 2000; Lorch, Lorch & Klusewitz, 1993; van den Broek, Lorch, Linderholm, & Gustafson, 2001). Students skilled in comprehension monitoring must be able to realize that there is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach, and that it begins with learning to set an accurate and useful purpose (van den Broek et al., 2001). Again, this applies back to the original principles of comprehension monitoring; students must learn which strategies are most appropriate for which texts.

**Planning for difficult passages.** When planning to read a passage, expository passages may provide more difficulty for students than narrative passages. Baker and Baker (1984) conducted a study of seventh grade students to see how they reacted to different types of texts. They found that the students were easily confused by texts that were “poorly organized or ambiguous,” all of which were expository (p. 34). In general, it seems that students are often unable to navigate the text structures or use them to guide their reading when reading expository pieces (Baker & Baker, 1984; Englert, Hiebert, & Stewart, 1988). However, Englert et al. (1988) also concluded that after being explicitly taught how to use text features, expository reading became much easier for students. It is clearly possible for students to transfer knowledge of comprehension monitoring
among text genres, curriculums and subject. However, it does require careful and planned scaffolding (Wolfe & Goldman, 2005).

**Evaluation.** During the evaluation stage of comprehension monitoring, students must be able to determine which during-reading strategies will be most effective and when to use them. As early as 1980, Collins and Smith identified, in their study, decisions that students could make to monitor their comprehension.

a. Ignoring and reading on because information is irrelevant  
b. Suspending judgment because it is likely to be cleared up later  
c. Forming a hypothesis to be tested as reading continues  
d. Rereading difficult passages and clarifying misconceptions  
e. Going to an expert sources to clear up understanding  

(p. 317).

In addition to these suggestions, students could also employ fix-up strategies while reading to get past roadblocks. Tovani (2000) introduces several fix-up strategies such as asking questions, making predictions, stopping and thinking, using context clues, connecting, visualizing and reflecting. Students skilled at comprehension monitoring will have a strong grasp of these fix-ups, as well as those proposed by Collins and Smith (1980) and be able to select those that will help them with their particular problem most. Afflerbach (1990) studied post-graduate students and found that predictions used as a form of comprehension monitoring led to better understanding; students were able to clarify their predictions, and hence, created stronger meaning. Predictions used properly during comprehension monitoring haven’t been the only strategy supported by
research; questioning has also become a topic of interest to researchers. Kardash and Howell (2000), in their study of 40 undergraduate students found that successful use of questioning during comprehension monitoring, especially those questions that valued judgment, helped students to be able to remember more from the text read during the study. Furthermore, as secondary students learn to develop various types of questions while reading, their reading comprehension performance increases (Faggella-Luby, Schumaker, & Deschler, 2007). Both questioning and predicting, as well as many other techniques, have proven to be quite valuable for the evaluation dimension of comprehension monitoring.

**Regulation.** During the third stage, regulation, students might need to reassess their learning by determining if they have reached misconceptions, reflecting on the processes they have used, or reflecting on their growth as a student (Jacobs and Paris, 1987). One non-negotiable and ever-crucial part of the regulation dimension is the notion of self-assessment and reflection. Fogarty (1994), as cited in Branch (1998) writes, “If students are to take on a posture of life-long learning they must become acutely aware of their own strengths and weaknesses” (p. 63). In order to be able to assess these strength and weaknesses, students must reflect on their monitoring processes. This can be done through reflective journals, surveys, interviews, and portfolios. When students participate in self-reflecting through journaling they learn to more clearly track their own
progress and increase their comprehension capabilities (Branch, 1998; Atwell, 2000). Furthermore, Burke (1994) writes, “Teachers can use journals as metacognitive strategies by assessing the students plan to monitor and evaluate their own work (p. 99). They can establish what they did to monitor their comprehension, the effectiveness of their choices, and what they should do differently next time. In essence, they are constantly evaluating their decisions and modifying their choices to become more successful learners.

Another successful way to help students regulate their comprehension processes is to encourage them through discussion. Discussion, in this case, can either be through student interviews or surveys. Jacobs and Paris in their 1987 study about metacognition concluded that interviews can certainly reveal a student’s understanding of his or her metacognitive practices in relationship to comprehension (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). As students verbalize their processes and problems they can begin to realize why they make certain choices, which strengthens their learning. Surveying can also help students to reflect on their comprehension monitoring processes from a different lens. Jitendra, Hoppes, and Xin (2000) used surveying as a way to allow their study participants to determine if they felt successful with comprehension monitoring. This research was again confirmed by Arkebauer et al. (2002) in a study that required students to reflect on their learning by completing attitude surveys along the way. They discovered that students felt more confident in their reading abilities; additionally, because
they felt more confident, they were willing to take on more difficult, challenging texts.

**Comprehension portfolios.** A summative assessment that is at the heart of the regulation domain of comprehension monitoring is the idea of a reading comprehension portfolio. Portfolios successfully allow students to re-examine goals they have set, how they went about achieving them, the strategies they frequently use, their strengths and weaknesses, and their progress (Branch, 1998; Campbell et. al, 1998; Hopkins, 2002). Portfolios encompass all three dimensions of comprehension monitoring, and provide an excellent opportunity for students to truly see their growth. The creation of a portfolio that shows the progress of a student adds to their potential to become more competent readers (Branch, 1998).

When engaging in the portfolio process, students are fundamentally engaging in the inquiry process. Nancy Atwell (1991), in her book *Side By Side*, writes, “when teachers invite students to become partners in inquiry, to collaborate with them in wondering how students are learning, schools become thoughtful places (p. 3). As students reflect on how to learn, they become more active learners with a greater chance of success in the literate world beyond high school.

**Summary**

The challenge that we, as educators, are faced with is no easy feat. With the pressures of NCLB and standardized tests mounting, we cannot forget that our
primary focus is to nurture life-long learners. We are charged with educating the students of this nation and helping them to learn the literacy skills necessary for future success, whether in college or the real world. However, this task is feasible if we begin to teach our students “how to learn rather than what to learn” (Branch, 1998, p. 26). We must shift our thinking from covering the content to using reading as a way to access the curriculum (Shoenbach et al, 1999). We can successfully educate our children for the future by teaching them how to monitor their own comprehension. They need to know how to select from the strategies we have taught them in order to plan their learning, they need to constantly evaluate their use of strategies during their reading, and they need to be able to reflect on what they did when the reading is finished and the meaning is discovered. By teaching students how to monitor their comprehension, we help them to become invested in their own education, while helping them to further develop their critical thinking and create quality work.

The current reality of American students leaving high school unprepared is certainly not a pleasant truth; it is, however, one that can and will be changed as educators, researchers, and teachers work together to wage a war on functional illiteracy, the inability to use basic reading and writing skills to communicate meaning, (Benson, 2010). As in any struggle within education, we need to keep the focus on the children, as they should be the winners of the war, unscarred and educated to support the future.
Research Design and Methodology

Study Setting and Participants

The setting for the study was an urban high school in eastern Pennsylvania. One of two “sister high schools” in the city, it is significantly larger than its counterpart with a population of about 3100 students, 750 of whom are enrolled in the junior class. The present demographics are as follows: 55% White, 33% Latino, 9% Black, 2% Asian, and less than 0.3% Native American. Currently, 996 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Students enrolled in the city’s high schools also have the opportunity to attend the local Vocational Technical School, enroll in School-to-Work programs, or to participate in dual enrollment, allowing them to begin college courses while still in high school. The district has a 95% graduation rate, with 49% of its seniors going on to a four-year college, 35% to a two-year college, 2% to technical school, 3% to the military, and 4% to employment. While the graduation rate is high for an urban comprehensive high school of its size, the school has not been as successful on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests. Although the school made AYP in Reading for the first time during the 2009-2010 school year, it remains on Corrective Action II according to the state guidelines aligned with No Child Left Behind.

The students participating in this study are 11th grade students who have scored basic on the PSSA. They were hand-selected by 10th grade English
teachers based on their desire to improve their academic performance, consistent attendance, and behavior. The most crucial component was student performance; students who had excellent work ethic but struggled with reading comprehension were recommended for the course. The current maximum enrollment for the course is 25 students, but only 18 students were actually placed in the class; all 18 students opted to serve as research participants in the study. 16 of those students have IEP’s, and two have 504 plans. 11 students are Latino, two students are white, and three students are African American. 16 of these students are defined as having low socioeconomic status according to the Pennsylvania State Guidelines.

**Data Gathering Methods**

While gathering data over the course of my nine-week study, I relied on several different methods “to lead to meaningful, accurate, and appropriate conclusions” (Hendrick, 2006, p. 71). I wanted to be sure that I had a wealth of data both to help me meet the needs of these students during our time together and to allow me to share our story of struggle and success accurately within this document. Therefore, I gathered data in the forms of surveys and interviews, field log notes, student artifacts, and checklists.
Surveys and Interviews. When designing and implementing this study, I wanted to ensure that my students could experience the benefits of self-reflection just as I did while collecting data. Surveys and interviews, or “inquiry data” as Hendricks (2006) calls them, provided students with opportunities to do so. MacLean and Mohr (1999) are proponents of using surveys in the classroom because they believe the surveys can help teachers see the scope of their question and tune them in to the general understandings of their students (p. 42). On the very first day of school, I surveyed students about their comfort with self comprehension-monitoring strategies. I compiled these results as a baseline for my research study so that I could compare their initial reactions to those at the end of the course (Hendricks, 2006). I also give this same survey on two additional occasions: once at the end of the first quarter and then at the end of the course. In addition, I gave another survey when we returned from a break to refocus students and remind them of our course goals. A large reason for my decision to use multiple surveys was because I knew that my students might feel comfortable answering questioning honestly when they did not have to share them with the class (Hendricks, 2006). Another type of inquiry data I collected was in the form of interviews. Interviews allowed me to capture the voices of my students. Holly, Arhar and Kasten (2005) contend that student interviews are “discussions with a purpose” (p. 288). I had previously interview questions (Appendix A) that guided each student interview, helping us to dig more deeply into understanding their
reading processes; we needed to uncover \textit{why} certain reading routines and attitudes existed and under what circumstances they might be changed. Often times, individual interviews turned into whole class interviews when students asked others in their reading groups about certain texts they had read or strategies they preferred.

\textbf{Field Log.} Another excellent source of data was the observational field log that I kept throughout the entire semester. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) describe the process of creating a field log as “the most common method used by the action researcher to describe what is occurring” (p. 140). The log serves as a repository for the researcher’s important ideas, quotes, or thoughts, and simultaneously creates a place for more sophisticated reflection and analysis. I made every attempt to write in my field log daily by “[jotting] notes as significant and noteworthy events occur[ed]” (Hendricks, 2006, p. 83). Many times, these notes consisted of post-its or tally charts that captured verbatim student comments and/or responses. I recorded, then reflected, on those brief notes in my field log in the form of reflective memos each afternoon to create a stronger sense of understanding. My post-lesson observations were more reflective in nature, as I attempted to draw conclusion based on the success of the overall lesson or activity. I used my observations to determine whether or not my lessons were successful (Hendricks, 2006). Another useful type of observation included in my
field log were student observations and shadow logs. Student observations allowed me to comment about the observed experiences of many different students within a class period. I wrote down student comments, gestures, and attitudes during these observations, so that I could reference them when writing reflective memos later. The creation of a shadow log helped me to focus on one particular student at a time in order to get a better understanding of that particular student’s experience. I generally used shadow logs when I noticed a student was quite disinterested or struggling. Both of these entries proved to be quite useful in developing character profiles for my students and really helped me to determine their growth throughout the quarter.

**Student Artifacts.** MacLean and Mohr (1999) state, “Student work may be the centerpiece of your data, helping you to understand and interpret all the rest” (p. 47). A significant amount of data for my thesis came from the student artifacts that I collected to examine student comprehension, progress, and challenges. As I modeled individual strategies for students, they kept portfolios with the strategies they used and the passages they read. Weekly, I examined each student’s portfolio and photocopied examples of student work. I particularly looked at their notes in the margins of passages, their annotations of questions, and their weekly double-entry journals (Appendix B) as evidence of the use of self-monitoring strategies in their everyday reading. More specifically, I was looking for student work that showed a progression in comprehension skill level, or the evidence that a student
was not progressing and needed some individual attention. These artifacts acted as continuous formative assessments that allowed me to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of comprehension monitoring strategies (Hendricks, 2006).

Checklists. As students learned to self-monitor their comprehension, I provided various checklists for them to use at various stages of the reading process. While completing the during reading checklists, students checked off each strategy they used to monitor their comprehension during reading. In another type of checklist, students were asked to evaluate their current comprehension. They needed to check off the following options for essential questions and big ideas within a unit: “I got it!” “I almost got it” or “I have no clue! (I need to reread)”. One useful analysis tool of this data was the tallying on student responses. After students turned in their checklists, it was interesting to see which self-monitoring strategies are used most frequently by students. After tallying, it was also useful to follow up by reviewing the information with students and asking them “why” they made particular choices. In addition, I continued my reflection on the tallying chart with reflective memos to examine themes, questions, and hypotheses.
Trustworthiness Statement

Establishing trust in a teacher-student relationship is not always an easy task. Unfortunately, in a new course, many students bring negative perceptions of teachers and school based on their interpretations of past experiences. It is not without the careful planning of opportunities to establish trust that the teacher is able to build trust with each and every student in the room. Similarly, trustworthiness within a research study must also be carefully planned, practiced, and reflected upon at every stage of the complex process.

In order to establish trustworthiness within my study, it was imperative that I protect my students who so happily agreed to join me on my journey of becoming a better teacher. Since they had dedicated themselves to my study, it was crucial that I show them the same respect. Therefore, I began my journey to protect their rights by applying for permission from their parents and my principal through informed consent forms to be signed by both parties (Holly, Arhar, & Kasten, 2005). While legally, I was required to write this letter, the more important letter I felt I crafted was a letter to my students explaining the process of action research (Appendix C). The letter invited them to ask questions about my study, write me notes throughout the process, and discuss the implications of what I was learning. To me, this letter opened up a very important communication line that would strengthen the trustworthiness not only within my study, but between the students and me.
To further protect my participants’ identity, I assigned a pseudonym for each of my students, as outlined by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005). I carefully used these pseudonyms when identifying their student work, reflecting on their behaviors and comments in class, and when analyzing their progress. I also kept all of my student samples, data, and field log in a locked filing cabinet so that I was the only person who had access to the files.

**Data Triangulation**

In order to be credible, it is important to practice the triangulation of data. Hendricks (2006) defines data triangulation as “a process in which multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed” for the purpose of establishing credibility (p. 72). I chose to triangulate my data sources in the forms of participant observations, artifacts, student interviews, and reflexivity. By comparing these forms of data, I was able to create a solid understanding of the students’ experiences with comprehension monitoring. This allowed me to capture the “realness” of student voices was crucial to a successful and meaningful study.

In addition, I chose to also add reflexivity as a triangulation method in my study. This is the method I was least familiar with yet highly interested in when I began my research. It has bothered me for years that our lowest track students are primarily Hispanic and of low socioeconomic status. I attempted to try, through reflexivity, to explore school biases, as well as my own, regarding the reading
skills of these students. The use of reflexivity definitely impacted my analysis of my students’ attitudes toward school, reading, and life.

**Researcher Bias**

While I was born and raised in the town of my study and attended the school I teach at, I had a much different school experience than many of my students. I initially, and naively, expected that we shared many common beliefs and ideas regarding school and success, but I clearly learned that I was wrong. I immediately realized I needed to gather “information from participants about their knowledge, values, beliefs, past experiences, feelings, opinions, attitudes, or perceptions” in order to avoid being a biased researcher (Hendricks, 2006, p. 89). I expected that the students of my study valued education as I did, and they simply struggled with reading; instead, it quickly became clear that they had no desire to read because they saw no value in reading as part of their education or future. MacLean and Mohr (1999) discussed the significance of acknowledging biases throughout the action research process. I needed to put aside my preconceived notions in order to be an unbiased researcher. In order to do so, I did not talk to any previous teachers about my students’ attitudes towards learning. Instead, when I met with their previous teachers, I focused on what strategies and approaches to learning helped particular students to be successful. By doing this, I lessened the opportunity to create bias towards particular students.
Researcher Groups

To further establish my credibility and trustworthiness, I participated in a teacher researcher group comprised of my fellow teacher researchers enrolled in the Reflective Practice Seminar. MacLean and Mohr (1999) believe that this teacher researcher group is essential for analyzing data correctly. Together, my fellow researchers and I shared our data, ideas, and interpretations in order to ensure that we were drawing accurate conclusions. Hendricks (2006) writes, “collaboration allows educators to gain multiple perspectives on critical educational issues (p. 67). My fellow researchers provided new ideas and insights about student work that I had not previously seen and helped me to see where my interpretations were faulty or lacking in evidence.

Summary

From the very beginning of my study, I knew that I would be significantly relying on my students to have an open line of communication with me about their attitudes towards reading. Therein was the danger: if students did not feel comfortable expressing their struggles, successes, and changing ideas about reading, they might not have provided me with the data I wanted to analyze their progress. The key to make my data collection plan work was to begin by building relationships with my students so that they would trust me enough to see the value of investing in their learning.
This Year's Story

Pre-School Jitters to First Day Wonders

Twas the night before school when all through the town
not a teacher was sleeping, or even lying down.
Their lessons were placed by the door with such care,
knowing a morning without stress would be quite rare.

And the students were lying, but not sleeping in beds
while nerves of new classes danced in their heads.
We all looked at schedules and I my class lists
While the students asked “RISE, What the heck is this?”

And so began the Eve of School teacher and student jitters. Although I had
successfully started 5 school years as a high school English teacher, I was still
incredibly nervous as I perused my class list for my new course, RISE, or Reading
Instructional Strategies Enrichment. I had not taught an eleventh grade class since
student-teaching and had never taught a test preparation course. Still I had a
glimmer of hope. Maybe I had some of these students as ninth graders, I thought.
No such luck. I knew few names on the list of 18 students and was instantly
intimidated by the number of yellow triangles indicating IEP students. I carefully
looked at the mini-picture next to each name, hoping that the faces of my soon-to-be
students would create some recognition and lessen my nerves as I prepared to
teach these grown-up children. Still I recognized only 3 from ninth grade and
possibly a few more who had gotten in trouble during passing time in the
hallways. What had I gotten myself into? Wait. Why am I nervous? Teaching
reading strategies is my expertise! I always build relationships with students. Why am I creating profiles for students who I haven’t even met? I turned off my computer and pretended to sleep.

Little did I know that my students were undergoing similar stresses. Figure 1 is a reconstruction from student journals about the first day of school jitters and preconceived notions of RISE.

Layered Story: Journal Reconstructions

Keri: Honestly, all I could think of was what I was going to wear on the first day of school and what boys would be in my classes. Lol. But seriously I wanted to know what this RISE was. I didn’t pick it. I was mad that I didn’t have Psychology on my schedule and I had this so I figured it wasn’t something good. I thought I would go to Mr. B and get my schedule changed because I like really wanted psychology. And I didn’t know anyone else who had it and so I wanted to get rid of it. And I am already good at reading so maybe I can go.

John: I don’t really get nervous for school. It’s just something I have to do and it’s only one more year for me. Then I can go into the air force so maybe they can pay for me to go to college later. I didn’t know what RISE was when I got my schedule in the mail, but AJ and Dominic had it so I figured it would be ok. I was worried because I didn’t know who the teacher was, but now I know who you are because you changed your name. With my friends in this class it should be ok.

Destiny: I get sooooooooo scared the night before school. I can’t sleep and I watched tv until like 3 am but I am not even tired today. J When I saw RISE on my schedule I didn’t know what it was so my mom called and asked. It was like a reading class to help me for the PSSA. I was mad but then I was like ok because I need to pass it to graduate. Then I got here and I see that it’s the
kids from my class last year so it’s ok. I think the teacher seems nice.

Jim: I can’t believe I am in this class instead of Vo-Tech. I should have two blocks at Vo-Tech and now I have to wait till next semester to be here. I can’t get out of here because it’s in my IEP and my mom and dad wants me to read better. I hate reading. I don’t want to be here. I don’t care about if I pass the PSSA. I’m not going to college anyways.

Figure 1. Layered Story: Reconstructed Journal Responses

The responses above show just some of the preconceived notions about both the concept of reading and being selected for the RISE class. Students did not elect to take RISE even though it is considered an elective credit. Instead, students were recommended by their 10th grade Critical Literacy, or year-long English, teachers to be in the RISE program. The recommendation was made on the premise that these students were hard workers who cared (or potentially could care) about their education but had difficulty monitoring their own comprehension. I instantly found that I had more students who “could potentially care” about being confident, critical readers, than those who already cared. I knew I had my work cut out for me. At the same time, meeting my students gave me a new sense of excitement. They weren’t nearly as scary as I had envisioned them to be, and I realized that they had been just as scared as I was. My class had a split lunch, so I quickly wrote in my field log: So far so good. They are very quiet, which is ok for now and never means anything. I don’t have as many
openly disgruntled students as I expected. I am eager to see what they write on their pre-surveys.

I met my students at the door with candy and a smile after lunch; yes, I was bribing them already, but it was for good reason. Unlike many of my fellow teacher researchers, I only had 9 weeks with these students before they left my class, so I knew that every minute was going to count. I needed to build relationships with them quickly, and I knew that treats certainly couldn’t hurt. Of course, there was a dual purpose for the candy. They had to trade their candy packs with other students based on prompts that I read aloud to them. By the end, they realized that they had traded with everyone while learning something about each of them. It was fun, and there certainly was a lot of laughter to break the awkward silences; secretly, I was building a community of learners.

As much as I wanted to continue with fun ice-breakers on that first day, I knew I needed to get down to business. I ended that first day with a pre-survey of current reading practices (Appendix D). I feared that switching to the serious school business would change the climate of the classroom and kids would become disinterested, but they were just fine. Appearing content, they filled out their surveys as they enjoyed their treat. While my first day had gone well, I knew it was going to be a challenge to help my students academically, even if we had started to build great relationships on that first day.
After my seemingly wonderful first day, I went home and compiled the first survey results of my 18 students. I needed to see where my students currently stood in terms of their comprehension monitoring strategies so that I could best aid them. I certainly had my pre-conceived ideas about where my students struggled. I had already looked at each of their Performance Tracker Profiles to check their 4Sight Standardized Test scores. However, I was hesitant to judge solely on test results, as I realized most of my students had probably blown them off since not a single one has scored proficient in any category. The surveys were enlightening and a quick reality check that my students did not regularly monitor their comprehension or even really know how to do so. Yikes! I observed the students carefully considering the options on the survey as they devoured their candy, leading me mistakenly to believe that the survey answers were going to show that they knew a lot about comprehension monitoring. I was shocked when I looked at the results presented in Table 1. My students were all over the place with strategies that they were consciously using. I was not surprised that the 17 of my 18 students, who were present to take the survey, reread when they were struggling; this is probably the most natural strategy to implement. I was also encouraged to see that many students were attempting to substitute words and make connections since I know these two strategies are significantly stressed in both ninth and tenth grades. I was also glad that many students thought they could identify when they lost track. What I could not
Table 1. Student Responses to Survey #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Stem Starters: When I read I…</th>
<th>Number of Student Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Periodically stop and ask, &quot;Does this make sense?&quot;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express the difference between my own knowledge and beliefs and ideas expressed in text.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express awareness or lack of awareness of what the content means.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express doubt about understanding when I am unsure or when meaning is unclear.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask &quot;Where did I lose track?&quot;</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the place where I began to lose comprehension.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use stem-starters to stay focused.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reread</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read on and try to clear up the confusion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute words I know</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make mind pictures to &quot;see&quot; in my head what the text means.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect what I am reading</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask myself questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use other strategies</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help if I have made attempts to understand but can't get it.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

believe was how few students actually expressed their lack of understanding and asked for help when they were stuck; I knew that I was going to need to address
this with the class. I wanted to be sure that they knew that I was there to help them. I also quickly understood that I needed to teach students how to question the text, use text features, and use stem starters to stay focused. However, I also knew it was easy for students to claim they used strategies to be active readers; I needed to see them in action to get a better grip on where to start.

This is No Fairy Tale

It was Day Two, and I again met my students at the door with a smile and a treat, except that it wasn’t candy today; instead, it was a highlighter. The students were not nearly as thrilled with today’s gift. Using my field log notes, I have recreated our opening discussion.

Me: (Big Smile) Good morning everyone! Today we need to take a pre-test to see how well you are using reading strategies to comprehend text.

Class: Ugh (Several heads down, eyes rolling)

Me: I know it’s not necessarily the most fun activity, but it is really important. Can someone please tell me why it is important to have a pre-test?

Class: Silence…

Me: Has anyone ever taken a pre-test before in a class?

Janice: Yeah…In Algebra II, I took one. It was last block.

Me: Well, I am sorry you have to take back-to-back tests. Why do you think your teachers want to give you a pre-test?
Robert: So you know how much we know.

Me: Yes, and so you can see how much you progress during RISE.

Class: Silence…

I had certainly hoped for a little bit better reception to our pre-test, but I was quickly realizing that my students’ attitudes about reading were emerging. I distributed the tests, read them the PSSA Sampler Item directions, and without further hesitation, let them begin. As they tested (or pretended to test), I circled the room and observed their behaviors. During this observation, I walked around the room as the students took their first PSSA Item Sampler. As I observed, I especially noted the amount of time students were able to stay focused, their natural use of comprehension monitoring strategies, and their body language. Although I guessed that my students would not have much reading stamina or use the strategies they had been taught in ninth or tenth grade, I had no idea that the average “check out” time of my students would be 13 minutes. It became instantly clear that I would need to carefully craft lessons that would build the reading stamina of my students. Additionally, how few students even bothered to read the questions before beginning the Item Sampler surprised me. Most of them just jumped right into the reading of the passage; this also made me realize that I needed to begin with the process of “How” to attack a passage before I taught them how to monitor their comprehension.
My initial reactions were reaffirmed when I examined their Item Samplers that evening. While I cared less about wrong answers than evidence of strategy use, I couldn’t help but be alarmed by the number of incorrect answers in this 13 question pre-test. Scores ranged from 0 correct to 6 correct with a mean of 3.34 and a median of 3. The average score was 3 of 13 correct. I wrote in my log field log: *I am so upset by the number of incorrect answers on the pre-tests. I knew that the scores wouldn’t be good, but I was hoping for at least 50%. Two of my students didn’t get any right. I know I shouldn’t get upset since this is only a pre-test and they didn’t really try, but it’s the didn’t try part that infuriates me. I worry I can’t make them want to try.*

In addition to the low scores, many of the papers came back with very few annotations or even markings on them. I had given students highlighters for a reason, and although I didn’t want to tell them to use them, I had expected them to use them because they knew to use them, didn’t they? I thought: *Didn’t the survey jog their memories yesterday? Don’t they want to show me they can do well on the first test? Do they really not care? Are they that turned off by reading? My head spun with thoughts and fears. I had three huge hurdles to overcome: building reading stamina, the process of annotating, and answering questions.*
Where to Start? Finding Something to Read

After serious consideration about how to approach my students’ disinterest in reading, I realized that I needed to spark their interest while secretly forcing them to read. It was time to for a trip to the library for some high interest books. I knew, however, that a trip to the library wasn’t exactly the most exciting adventure for reluctant teenage readers. Luckily, I had a plan. I knew I needed to hook these kids, so I chose a few high interest books (Appendix E) that both previous students and I had enjoyed, and read key excerpts aloud. The response was exactly as I had expected.

*Me:* Ok gang! Today we are going to pick something that you WANT to read. It’s completely your choice as long as it is not a picture book or early reader.

*Class:* Giggles

*Jim:* But I like picture books, Miss, and I don’t like to read long books. I don’t like to read books at all.

*Other Students:* Me neither  (echoes throughout room)

*Keri:* I like to read. I read like teen books a lot and they are fun.

*Emily:* Yeah, I like books about teens but they have to be short.

*Me:* Ok, well let’s talk about lots of kinds of books that you can read. Jim, you might like this one. (I read a selection from a graphic novel, *Bone.*)

*Jim:* Oh...We can read that? ...Can I have that one?
PJ: No, I want that one Miss. Do you have any more of them?

Me: This is from our library; we are going to visit there after lunch. Let me read to you from a few more books.

John: Sweet. Story time! (Laughter).

Me: This book is called Suckerpunch. It is one of my favorites. (teeth sucking). Before you judge it give it a chance. (I read).

Robert: I think I like that one. It looks short and little.

Lenny: Yeah...can you find me one that’s like that short? I like those Bluford books. Do you got any of them?

Me: I’d prefer that you didn’t read Bluford, since I know you read them already, but I know some other authors you might like: Walter Dean Myers, Volponi, Trumani.

Lenny: Yeah, ok. But they have to be short cuz I don’t like reading.

I knew that once I read from a few select titles that I could find additional books that kids would be interested in reading. I knew that they were not necessarily going to love, or even like the books, but I at least encouraged them to look for a book or trust me to help them find one. I also made sure to read from some non-fiction selections because I know that many reluctant readers tend to prefer non-fiction. I chose The Autobiography of LeBron James, For the Love of the Yankees, and Hitler Youth.
The trip to the library went well, and everyone found a book, even though I felt exhausted by the end of the block. When I finally sat down on the library couch with my students to read my own book and breathe a sigh of success, the bell rang. It was a fatiguing success and a reminder of the fact that my students needed to be doing more work than I was.

**The “Route” of All Evil**

With books in hands and a possibly positive attitude on reading, I was afraid to ruin my students’ newfound enthusiasm. However, I knew that I needed to address the PSSA Item Samplers they had royally bombed on that second day. The PSSA, “the ‘route’ of all evil,” as Jenny had described it on her first survey, was treacherous to these 11th graders, hanging over their heads like the blackest storm cloud until they successfully passed. I long debated about how to return their pre-tests without them freaking out, saying they were dumb, or totally tuning out for the day. I wrote in my field log: *If I lose them today when I give them these back, I might never regain their attention. This is a fragile situation. And I don’t know whether to scold them for not trying or ignore the scores completely. Neither seems right.* Neither seemed right because neither was right. I was still looking through a teacher lens, and I needed to be looking through a student lens. What better way than to find out what kids really thought about their pre-test? The pastiche in Figure 2 shows their roadblocks. The right cone of each pair shows the...
concentration struggle, while the left cone showed struggle with the content.

Figure 2. Pastiche of Roadbloacks.
I should have expected the typical answers of “I’m bored” or “I’m tired” or “It’s boring,” but I had expected that as 11th graders they would have had more motivation. Regardless of my surprise, it felt good for the students to get out all of their feelings about the passages. Plain and simple: it had been torture for them. More importantly, I used their roadblocks as a tool to talk about what they SHOULD HAVE been doing when trying to “attack the passage.” We developed a Good Readers Strategy List (Appendix F) for the purpose of overcoming some of those roadblocks to reading. However, I quickly realized, by looking at overwhelmed faces, that I needed to simplify our list and make it manageable for my students. We carefully examined our Good Reader’s Strategy List and selected the strategies we thought would be initially most useful EVERY time we read. We eliminated those strategies that we were less comfortable with or only used sometimes. The strategies in Figure 3 show the strategies the students and I chose to work with first.

![Figure 3. Beginning Strategies to Implement](image-url)

- **Beginning Strategies to Implement**
  1. Use the text features! Pre-read the directions, topic box, title, author, end notes
  2. Pre-read and annotate the questions to set a purpose for reading
  3. Annotate the text during reading
To start, three was the most they could handle, and that was okay with me, too. I didn’t want to overcomplicate anything. Now, it was time to apply these tips to the articles they had bombed. I didn’t want them to feel like I was leaving them to figure it out on their own, so I carefully modeled the first passage for them. We vigilantly walked through the steps above and all of the students marked exactly what I did. Then, I scaffolded and had them practice with the next page in pairs. Finally, they annotated the third page of the passage on their own. I was amazed by Figure 4. During the first set of annotations, Destiny had very superficial annotations. She had highlighted the topic sentence and commented on the title. However, after guided practice, her annotations became much more meaningful and useful, as can be seen in Figure 4. Destiny’s transformation is representative of the changes in quantity of annotations of all my 17 students present that day. I chose to use hers because she had the fewest annotations during the pre-test. In her first interview, she commented to me, “I know I should have written on it, but I was so bored and didn’t care at that point. And most of the time I don’t even know what to write. I don’t know where to start. It’s like, a lot.” Destiny, like my other students desperately needed explicit teaching about how to annotate a passage.

Through my students’ annotation transformation, I discovered that although they might not be monitoring their comprehension on their own, they
certainly could do it with my lead. The annotations were much more useful, the highlighting was purposeful, and a clear purpose for reading had been set to activate the short-term memory.

Figure 4. Destiny’s second attempt with “Necessity is the Mother of Invention” after days of practice with comprehension monitoring.
I think it was also incredibly helpful that we weren’t focusing on “getting the right answer,” which eliminated some of the instant stress attached to the high stakes test that must be passed in order to graduate.

For students who truly struggle, this requirement isn’t as much of a motivator as it is anxiety.

“Our” Story

After successfully scaffolding instruction for my students to follow our three designated steps (use text features, pre-read questions, annotate) while reading and I succeeding in pairing every student with a book, I felt an initial sense of accomplishment. I hoped that they were beginning to learn something from me after my many days of learning a great deal from them. Still, I was feeling quite uneasy about making them my research subjects. I wrote in my field log, after awaking in a panic at 3:00 am, “I almost feel guilty that I haven’t told my students that they will be part of something so important to me, my action research. I have spent so much time planning to help them and telling them that I am going to help them, but what if I can’t, don’t, or/mess up? How will they feel if I fail them? How will my study turn out if they don’t succeed in English/PSSA/School? It will be another empty promise. Will they think I am only trying to help them, so that I can get my master’s degree? Will they think I have an ulterior motive that will hurt them in the long run? Will they think I am I
the PSSA spy?” That was it. Enough anxiety over introducing my study too early. It was time.

Me: Ok Gang. I need to talk to you about something very important to me.

Keri: OMG Miss. Is everything ok?

Me: Yes, Keri. It’s nothing bad at all. I just wanted to tell you about how important this class is to me this semester.

Class: Smiles and Nods

Me: Right now I am working on my Master’s Degree at Moravian College and I am working on a big research project. I am trying to figure out how I can better help my students be active and critical readers. I have done a lot of research on how to help students read “smarter” so they understand more—

Dominic: Read smarter?

Keri: Yeah, I don’t get that smarter word.

Me: I want to help my students, you, learn to stop and think while you read so that you have a better idea of the text. It’s “like” make smart choices about what to do WHILE you are reading so you get it.

Destiny: Oh like TtT (Talking to the Text). I hate that.

Me: I know it can sometimes be a pain, but it really does help, doesn’t it?

Emily: Yeah, but it takes sooooo much longer.
Me: (laugh). Ok. Yes, it does because it takes work to make meaning of everything. You should see how long it takes me to read my textbooks! Anyway, I am doing a study about what helps students read “smarter” and be actively engaged. I would really like if some of you would participate in my study by sharing your stories this semester.

John: Ah, Miss. I hate writing stories.

Me: (small laugh). You actually won’t be writing stories. It is more my story or interpretations of what happens this semester. How you all improve. What works or doesn’t work. And I want to share what you think helps, too. I write my story in a “thesis” document and it will be published at Moravian in the library. Any questions now?

Heads shake “no”

Me: Ok, then I have a question for you. How many of you would be willing to participate? I would keep your names anonymous and nothing can be used against you.

Every hand is raised, smiling faces.

It was unanimous, and I was shocked. While they may not like reading, they were either really willing to work at getting better at it, or they were interested in helping their teacher. I still am not sure which one it was, but I am okay with either; I knew that their commitment would eventually pay off. I distributed parental consent forms, read them the letter, and promised them
donuts if they were returned by Friday—whether or not they opted to serve as research study participants; every form was returned, signed, and dated the very next day.

**Let’s Get Serious: Setting Attainable Goals**

The kids were excited. I was excited. It was almost as if the excitement was tangible the way it hung in the air. I used the novelty of being in a college study to my advantage, as I set up their quarter calendar. I wrote on it when their assignments were due and when mine were due. I wanted them to see that I was going to be working just as hard, if not harder, than they were.

I also built “Reflection” days into our calendar. Before I even finished explaining the schedule, Janice wanted to know what these reflection days were. Janice likes to work through things quickly and get “stuff done” and tends to view stopping to think about what she’s done as a waste of her time. I was faced with a dilemma: *how would I explain this so she didn’t freak out about having to think about things?* I went back to the idea of my study and said something like this: “Well, you know how I am doing my study, right? Well, I have been setting goals along the way to make me a better teacher, so I can help you all be more successful. Every so often, I need to check in with myself, or my classmates, to make sure that I am on track to meet my goals. I take just a few minutes and see what I’ve done, what it means, and what I have to do next. You know I have a
hard time staying on track, so it helps me stay focused. I am going to help you do
the same. On reflection days, we are going to set goals and then see how you are
attaining those goals throughout the quarter. Sometimes we might take a survey,
write a journal, or I might meet with you.” I clenched my teeth, waited, and
expected an outburst, but it didn’t come. “Ok,” she said, “I gotcha.”

The ease with which students accepted our new process surprised me;
there were no complaints from anyone. I didn’t know whether to be leery of the
lack of comments or whether I should accept that as a sign that my students were
eager to set goals and make progress. After lunch that day, I spent five minutes
with each of my 16 students who were present and worked with them to set their
own goals. The most frequent student goal was “Remember what I read,” so I
pushed them to use specific reading terms, such as inferencing, finding the main
idea, summarizing, questioning, etc., to narrow down the large goal of
remembering. As a springboard, we looked at their self-rankings of skills on their
surveys, and tried to use those to set their attainable immediate goal. I wanted
them to be simple and reasonable so the students would feel successful when
they tried to achieve them. Figure 5 shows each student and his/her goals.

Overall, the students did a nice job of creating realistic goals, but I really
had to push a few of them to make realistic goals. For example, Jeremy’s goal
was to understand everything he read. That is obviously not practical, since there
are many different types and levels of texts. It was more reasonable for him to
learn how to approach these different kinds of passages at the end of the quarter.

Similarly, Danny’s quarter goal, like many other students, was to pass the PSSA.

While it was excellent that he was aiming for proficiency, I knew that he needed to start smaller, by improving on just one Sampler at a time. I pushed him to celebrate his progress rather than simply passing a test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Immediate Goal</th>
<th>Quarter Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PJ</td>
<td>Highlight and then summarize to understand</td>
<td>Be able to write a response to a reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Be able to read on my own longer</td>
<td>To finish a whole book and understand it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>To learn how to take a test</td>
<td>Be able to make inferences about what I read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>To stop at each page and summarize</td>
<td>To be able to discuss what I read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominic</td>
<td>To connect stuff so I stay focused</td>
<td>To be able to stay focused for a whole passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenny</td>
<td>To figure out what to do when I get lost</td>
<td>To be able to write an open-ended response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>To work on context clues</td>
<td>To be able to figure out vocabulary questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>To make inferences when I read</td>
<td>To be able to express what I mean in words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keri</td>
<td>To find the main idea using the 1-2-1</td>
<td>To be able to make inferences about what the author really means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>To not over highlight by paraphrasing</td>
<td>Be able to find the main idea without help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izabella</td>
<td>To write better annotations</td>
<td>To evaluate “bias” (authors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>To ask better questions when I read</td>
<td>To know what strategy to use when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>To not get tricked by answers</td>
<td>To set my own purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>To stay focused with non-fiction</td>
<td>To know more to use as background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>To write annotation while I am reading</td>
<td>To improve my scores on Item Samplers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>To know what to do when I don’t get something</td>
<td>Understand how to read different kinds of passages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelly</td>
<td>To not be distracted</td>
<td>To read a whole book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. Short Term and Long Term Student Goals.*
Starting the Portfolio

At the start of the next class, we began putting the first pieces of our comprehension portfolio together. I modeled what I wanted it to look like. In the front, we put the initial survey. We then added the initial Item Sampler Pre-test, the revised Samplers, and their newly set goals to the folder. Very quickly, I asked them to look at how much progress they had made already and write a brief reflective journal about their progress. Figure 6 shows direct quotes from the students’ reflective journals.

While all of the student comments were positive, I chose to share the comments Izabella, Danny, Nancy, Robert, and Jim wrote because they had adopted some of the language we had been using in class such as “eliminating answers,” “talking to the text,” “memory tricks,” and “focus.” Izabella, one of my most hard working students, did an excellent job of expressing her success with attempting to answer the question before looking at the answer choices; I had worked with her one-on-one to practice this skill because she often knew the right answer but became confused with the choices the test creators presented. By answering the question first, she had a more solid understanding of what to look for in the answer selections. Nancy did an excellent job realizing that even though the passage was boring, she could still stay engaged in the text by annotating. Like Izabella, she noted the provided answers tricked her as well,
so she attempted to eliminate answers by referring to her annotations as we had practiced in class. Similarly, to be more successful, Robert focused on eliminating answers. While Robert tended to be one the quieter students in class, I soon found that his silence was not be confused with lack of skill. He was
extremely capable of monitoring his own comprehension and would gladly share
his approaches through writing but not aloud. Jim found our short-term memory
activation practice to be useful. He coined them “tricks” and that is how the rest
of the class began to refer to them as well. He found success when he annotated
the question first and wrote key words on the top of the passage. He then referred
back to these words when he got distracted in order to focus on what was
important. Finally, I found Danny’s comments to be quite interesting. Even
though he wasn’t feeling well, he had still tried to use the strategies we had been
practicing in class. When I responded to his journal I wrote: Danny, I am so
sorry you weren’t feeling well. Even in your illness, look at how much better
your annotations were. When I compare this to “Brown Glass Windows” your
annotations have doubled! You also show evidence of eliminating answers! I
look forward to seeing how fantastic you will do when you are feeling up to par!
I wanted Danny to see that even though he was ill, he had still done much better.
I wanted him to focus less on the score and more on the amount and quality of
annotations. Unfortunately, in the coming weeks, Danny would miss an
extensive amount of school, averaging two missed days of school per week.

A Grand Balancing Act

Surveys. Goal and Progress Interviews. Independent Reading. Strategy
Introduction and Instruction. Reflective Journals. Discussion. My list of
classroom activities to help students learn to monitor their comprehension had become quite large. I worried how I, and, in turn, they, would manage it. I wrote in my field log: *I am afraid I have taken on too much right away with my students, but I really don’t know what I want to give up. Each thing on my list has a specific purpose and plays a role in getting my students to eventually monitor on their own. I need all of these things in place so I can be begin to scaffold to help them make decisions about their reading on their own after the quarter break that will be here before I know it. I have so much to pack in during this 9 week course that I need to budget every minute of their time and my own. It was clear that I needed to figure out some kind of routine that would help my students to not feel as if we were shifting from activity to activity to activity with no rhyme nor reason. I wanted them to see how each of these pieces connected. We needed a schedule.*

**Implementing a schedule.** I also attempted to help students balance their schedule of independent reading, article reading, PSSA Samplers, and reflective journals. It was a lot to juggle, but I knew I needed to have multiple activities to keep them engaged. My planned schedule during week three was written on the board as it appears in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Daily Schedule

We never followed it exactly, but it immediately gave students a time frame to work within; with this schedule I did have an ulterior motive: I needed to teach them time and task management. Secretly, they, too, tried to use the schedule for something else: a checklist that counted down the activities of class. While at first I took that notion personally and assumed that they wanted to just get through class, I soon realized that was not the case. When I asked Dominic why he checked off the activities after we completed each one he replied, “I like to see how much stuff I get done in a day. We like do a lot in a little time.” His tablemate, John, overhearing our conversation added, “Yeah and then I know what to get ready for next. Like how if I already get what you’re teaching I can move a little faster and then I can go back to doing something I like, like looking at those UpFront Article things.”

Independent reading—A class at odds. When I introduced the first class activity, independent reading, I was met with mixed reactions. Some
students were furious they had to read for 12 whole minutes, and other students
wanted to read for a longer period of time. I reminded them that they should read
for as long as they could stay focused, whether that was for 5 minutes or the
entire 12. Those students who got distracted quickly were to write down how
long they read, what distracted them, why they got lost, or what roadblock they
encountered. Those students who wanted to just be engrossed by their books read
the entire 12, often begging for more. My response was always the same. “We
are all in this together. As the entire class builds its reading stamina, we will
increase the time. I promise.” That temporarily appeased everyone, relieving
those who didn’t want to be forced to read longer and providing a hope for others
that they would be able to read more soon. Eventually, by the end of the course,
we would go on to extend our independent reading time to the entire half hour
before lunch.

Strategy introduction and practice: Saved by the bell! One major
advantage of having this class third block was that my students were with me for
half an hour, left for a half hour lunch, and then returned for another fifty-five
minutes. This gave me just enough time to have my students complete
independent reading in a small dose and introduce a strategy before they went to
eat. Because introducing something new was always nerve-wracking for me, and
a little stressful for them, they got to process it over lunch, realize it was going to be okay, and be ready to go when they returned.

**Closing out the day.** In order to bring closure to each day after Strategy Instruction, I varied activities to help students reflect on their new understandings or continuing progress. I utilized Exit Slips for students to ask questions or explain what they had learned, class discussions to do a whole class “check-in” about what was/was not working, and reflective journals for students to reflect on their individual growth or struggles.

**Two Steps Forward**

**Step one: Enhancing annotations.** Since my students had already been practicing using text features, pre-reading questions, and annotating the text with comments, I decided I should simply try to expand on what they were already doing to help them learn to monitor their comprehension. “*Don’t overwhelm them. Baby Steps. Reading is a process,*” I wrote in my field log. “*I see that they ask a lot of questions about words they don’t know when they are annotating, but I don’t see them asking good questions. I need to teach them how to question, but that is often hard, even for very experienced readers. I need to start smaller, baby steps. I should start by helping them realize what they DO know: Paraphrasing ideas. That’s where to start.*”
So on that very first day of strategy introduction, I gave my students an article, “Teenage Driving,” which consisted of 2 editorials, and asked them to begin to paraphrase. I broke the article into sections and photocopied each section on a different piece of paper. I immediately told students that they could not move onto the next paper until we had finished the previous one. (In retrospect, I should have handed them out one at a time rather than in a packet). I created blank boxes next to places where I wanted the students to write their paraphrases as a guide. (See Figure 8). As we had done with our first three steps, I modeled how to paraphrase with the first chunk. In addition, I continued to model how to annotate text features and pre-read the questions to set a purpose; clearly our purpose for this passage was to evaluate which editorial was more effective.

I did the first box for the students, I read the first paragraph aloud, and wrote “do not need more laws for teen drivers.”

Me: Easy enough, kiddos?

Destiny: Yes. So Easy. You just put it in your own words.

Me: Yup. Just like when we try to learn new words. It helps us remember.

I will read half of the next paragraph aloud. I want you to put it in your own words. (I read and wait a few seconds). Any suggestions about what we might write? (no hands). Jeremy, can you help me out?

Jeremy: Well they want to go places.
Me: Yes, it is clear they want to be able to drive. Where do they want to go?

Jeremy: I don’t know...school.

Me: Does it say school anywhere?

Jeremy: No...but I would want to drive to school.

Me: Good connection. Can anyone else tell me where they want to drive?

Destiny: It says here (pointing) to activities for them and their families.

Me: Good. I want everyone to highlight that part. Write in the box “transport to activities,” ok?” (nods)

LEARNING TO PARAPHRASE: CHUNK #1

A student opinion

Student 1 Editorial

All too often society singles out teenagers as a group and makes unfair judgments about them. That has happened once again. This time new teenage drivers in most states are faced with a driving law that prohibits them from having more than one teenage passenger. Such a law is both needless and unjust.

Teenagers do not use their cars just for socializing with friends. We also use them to transport ourselves and our companions to work, to carry brothers and sisters to their activities, to go to volunteer activities where we give our time to help others. Why should those of us who are reliable and conscientious be penalized because a few teens take risks and have wrecks? The chances are excellent that those few will still engage in the same risks, law or no law, while those of us who are law-abiding pay the price. The mayor of our town Mr. Allen Price is adamant that such a

Do not need more laws for teen drivers

*Need for transport to activities
*Helps busy parents

Figure 8. Learning to Paraphrase.

After another chunk together, the students had the hang of this strategy before heading off to lunch. After lunch, they did guided practice with the rest of
the article. As they continued further, I gradually placed fewer boxes and asked them to decide where to paraphrase. While their paraphrases were much better when I provided the boxes, I was happy that they were at least attempting to do it on their own. I figured it didn’t take long to draw boxes on our passages, and if it was going to help them practice paraphrasing, I could spend the few extra minutes before photocopying.

I repeated this type of scaffolding process every day during strategy instruction and practice time. Every day, we used the same passage, and I added a skill, but not necessarily a new one. First, I added connecting, since that seemed to be the most natural. Then I introduced summarizing at the end of a page. Next, I added visualizing, which proved to be hilarious but useless with this passage. They drew ridiculous cars and angry kids. I applauded them for trying, and we had a great discussion about what other types of readings might better work with visualizing. Figure 9 shows some of the types of literature we decided visualizing might be better for.

![Figure 9. Student Comments About Visualizing](image)

Visualize about real places

Visualize in fiction!

Visualize in poetry

Visualize math problems

*Figure 9. Student Comments About Visualizing*
Step two: Learning to question. By the fifth day of practicing with the strategies all at once, I felt as though they knew the passage well enough to ask questions. After promising them that this was the final day we would be working with this passage, and many sighs of relief, I invited them to write any questions they could come up with in the margins. I gave no further directions and let them have 10 minutes to create their questions before lunch. While they were at lunch, I wrote all of their questions on the board. After lunch, I asked the students to help me categorize the questions. I put three categories on the board: Meaning, Wondering, Evaluating. I told them that the “Meaning” category was for things in the text we didn’t understand: words, phrases, ideas. The “Wondering” category was anything that we might think about that wasn’t related to determining which editorial was better. The “Evaluative” category was reserved for questions that helped us to think about which one was better. After explaining each heading, the students began placing the questions in categories. Very quickly we noticed that we had an abundance of “Meaning” and “Wondering” questions, but only one “Evaluative” question: “Why is this one so much longer?” We discussed that while length doesn’t always make a passage better, in this case longer seemed to be better because the passage included more facts. I sent them back to the passage to write more evaluative questions and expanded our list. Figure 10 shows a sampling of each type of question.
When a student asked me if the “Meaning” and “Wondering” questions were bad questions, I knew I needed to clarify the purpose of the activity. I didn’t want students to think their questions were bad but rather that they just had a different purpose. I explained to them that it is really important for us to question the author’s reasoning and opinions when we are reading an opinion piece. While I don’t think they fully understood the concept, it was at least a step in the right direction.

I left school that day proud my students had so brilliantly questioned the validity of the teenage driving piece. I wrote in my field log, “Today was probably one of the most successful classes I have had so far. I think that using the article over a period of days really helped to show them all that goes into the process of annotating. I am eager to see how well they will continue to do.”
One GIANT Step Back

When my students entered the door that next day, a Friday, I was so excited to start working with them on our next reading. They, too, entered happy and got right to work on their independent reading. After having implemented our schedule for an entire week, it had already become routine and took very little reminding on my part to begin reading. My avid readers were still not stopping until the last second, and it appeared as though some of my more reluctant readers were increasing their stamina. I watched them look at the book and turn the pages, and I naively assumed that they were reading. Instead of doing strategy instruction that day, I decided to check in with my students about their books. My hope was that they would be intrigued by each other’s choices and possibly find a potential book to read for the next quarter. My dreams were shattered when a few students revealed that they were not really reading.

Me: We have heard a few great mid-book summaries so far. Any more suggestions. PJ, I haven’t heard from you yet. How is your book?

Class laughter.

PJ: Honestly, Miss, I haven’t really been reading it this week. It sucks.

Me: Hmm. Well I am sorry you don’t like your book, and I wish you would have told me you didn’t like it earlier in the week. So what have you been doing while we all have been reading?
PJ: Well I have kind of just been turning the pages and thinking about other stuff. I figured since you were reading, you wouldn’t notice. No offense, Miss.

Me: Yikes. I have to say I am surprised. Are other people having the same issue?


Me: I wish you would have told me, too. I want you to read something you like, not something that you are being forced to read. This is supposed to be reading for enjoyment. After lunch, we are going to the library. We need to renew our books anyway. This is an open invitation for any of you to switch your book.

I was completely shocked at PJ’s comment since he was the one who originally begged for the book he had chosen. I wrote in my field log: Did my book talk trick him into picking that book? Was he just trying to please me and pretend he was going to read? He makes it clear that he will “play school” but doesn’t show any real interest in wanting to learn or read. I worry about him more than Jeremy. Jeremy is so driven by vo-tech, and his parents are supportive, so he will be okay. I can show him the technical section, and he can find something. I am at a loss for ideas for PJ.

After lunch, I met my students at the library, where they had a choice to search for a new book or sit on one of the couches and read either their book or a
magazine. I was met by many happy faces, including some that I did not expect. Dominic was ecstatic, “Miss, I can read a sports magazine?” I smiled and nodded, and he and PJ ran off to the magazines. I initially started forward to follow PJ, but I had a second thought: *Hmm...Maybe I can wait to see what he picks up there and then get an idea.* I directed Jeremy to the technical reference section, and let him peruse the shelves. After about ten minutes, I went back to find PJ and noticed that he, Dominic, and John were engrossed in a sports magazine. Lebron James was on the cover, palming a ball. PJ asked me if he could read the magazine for his book, and I told him that the magazines were not allowed to leave the library. I reminded him of the Lebron James book I had previewed at the beginning of the year and asked him if he wanted to read that. He said, “Miss, that was so long.” I countered by asking him to reflect on what happened when he chose the shortest book with all the white space. He shrugged, I went to find the Lebron James book, and he agreed to give it a try.

With 20 minutes left in class, I looked around to see everyone with a book again. I jotted down on an index card: *Need accountability for reading L.* When I looked at the note later, I felt slightly defeated. I had really wanted to just give my students time to enjoy reading, but I couldn’t simply trust that they would read on their own now during independent reading time. I had two choices: I could play nasty schoolteacher and circle the room while kids read, or I could continue to model reading for enjoyment and introduce the metacognitive
reading log. I decided the latter would be much better, and at the same time help them to remember that they should still be thinking while they are reading, even if it is just for fun.

A Happy Hiatus

Friday’s revelation that PJ and Jeremy, and possibly a few others who were unwilling to fess up, weren’t actually reading was disheartening. I so desperately wanted to be back in that state of happiness and productivity that we had experienced with questioning. I was eager to find another relevant opinion piece to help them further their question creating and annotating. However, I had to do very little searching; I clicked the television on for the MTV Video Music Awards when I was instantly inspired by the “opinion” songs exchanged between Kanye West and Taylor Swift about Kanye’s public humiliation of Taylor earlier that year. Kanye attempted to share his side of the story and ask for forgiveness, while Taylor attempted to accept his apology. When I watched, I noticed how Taylor’s song seemed so sincere, while Kanye’s appeared much less genuine. Wow, I thought. I knew that my students would likely be engaged by this topic.

In class on Monday, I explained that we would be working on opinion pieces again. I got some eye-rolls and a few sighs (justifiably so), but those looks quickly changed when I said that we were going to be analyzing lyrics and
performances from the VMA’s. Many students knew exactly where I was headed, but I asked them not to share with others who had not seen the performances. First, I distributed the lyrics for Taylor Swift’s song. I asked the students to paraphrase the lyrics to get a better understanding of what she was trying to say. Since my class is well-versed in pop culture, they immediately knew that this was her way of forgiving Kanye West. *Whew! We get paraphrasing!* Then, I asked them to question the sincerity of her words. I asked them to highlight or underline words that made her seem sincere/insincere. Quickly, they decided she was indeed sincere as they highlighted lines such as “who you are is not what you did” and “everyone has messed up.” *Yes! We successfully evaluated her lyrics!*

I distributed Kanye’s lyrics to the class, just as I had Taylor’s, and again I asked students to paraphrase. Before students could translate lyrics into their own words, I saw many comments being exclaimed on papers. “OMG! I can’t believe he said that!” “That is so messed up!” “What is he even saying?????” It was as I had expected. We stopped to have a class conversation that went something like this:

*Me:* Ok. I see a lot of angry comments. Let’s talk about what we’ve seen

*PJ:* This is just wrong. He should be apologizing not saying stuff like that.

*Keri:* I like love Taylor Swift, and I can’t believe what a jerk he is.
Destiny: I was so angry when I saw this last night. I know you don’t want me to say it yet, but he is not sorry with that.

Jeremy: (laughs). That was foul, Miss. He is not sorry.

Me: Okay, I see you are questioning his sincerity already. Think about what we did on Friday. What do you question about his sincerity?

Dominic: He says d-bag. That’s mad disrespectful.

Jim: Yeah and it’s like being a scumbag is a good thing.

Lenny: He curses because there are all these symbols. You don’t curse when you’re trying to make things right with someone.

Me: Okay, good. So who’s opinion song here is more effective?

Emily: Well obviously Taylor’s because she is nicer.


Keri: But maybe Kanye is sorry. He always writes weird stuff.

Me: Ok, can you explain more, Keri?

Keri: He says it with a lot of sarcasm like he is making fun of those people.

Me: The scumbags?

Keri: Yes. I think he just doesn’t know how to say it right.

Me: You bring up a good point. After seeing so many interviews with him, I don’t doubt that he is sorry. But was this an effective way of apologizing when you compare it with Taylor’s forgiveness song?
Keri: No, it’s not. Hers is way better, but I think he like tried.

PJ: Yeah, but it wasn’t enough. He coulda wrote something better. He is mad talented.

John: He shouldn’t be allowed at the VMAs no more. He looks [dumb].

Because the students were so familiar with the topic and so personally invested in Taylor Swift’s feelings, they could easily see that Kanye’s song was much less effective; it was abrasive when Taylor’s was soft and kind, and their voices really emphasized the differences.

To wrap up our discussion, students wrote a paragraph reflection about why they questioned his sincerity using 2-3 quotes from the lyrics. These were the best pieces of writing I received to date because there was so much passion in their voices. I quickly realized that I would have much more success getting them to evaluate readings if I could find things to which they were personally attached.

The engaging and authentic discussions that my students and I had prompted me to take a new look at the kinds of reading we were doing in class. It was clear that high interest lyrics were much more effective at motivating my students to work hard at annotating.
Self-Monitoring: Student Suggestions

After three hard weeks of working on becoming more aware of roadblocks and selecting strategies to overcome them, I wanted my students to feel a sense of accomplishments. I distributed a survey to my students and asked them to fill it out honestly (Appendix G). I reminded them that before they filled out their surveys that they should look back at their comprehension portfolio. I wanted them to look back at their original goals and the work we had done since they had written them to track their progress.

The purpose of the survey was twofold: first, I wanted to see how they felt about their progress on their goals; second, I wanted to know what was working for them. All of my students, except Max, who was absent, took the survey. The results of the survey are displayed in Figure 11. I was rather pleased with the results of the surveys, which indicated that they felt as though they were seeing growth in themselves, just as I was seeing that growth. It also helped me to determine what they were enjoying and what they felt was actually helping them. I was not surprised, and certainly thrilled, that most students commented that they were enjoying their independent reading books. One of my primary goals had been to help them appreciate reading, and they were enjoying their books, I thought I was making some progress at this point.

I was, however, surprised that three students had said that going over the Item Samplers had helped them to feel successful. I had thought that three days
of showing them how to take the test, having them retake each section with scaffolding, and then writing a reflection on their progress had been brutal. In addition, when I did a member check with my students about their answers, I realized that more of their comments really related to the Item Samplers. The writing comment had related to writing the reflection of growth and the practicing comment directly correlated with our revision of the Item Samplers. These comments lead me to hypothesize that the simple process of teaching them to take a test gave them an initial feeling of success.
I also enjoyed the similes at the end of the survey, as shown in Figure 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For me, reading is like…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“…a moment of peace and silence” Robert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…a flower blossoming” Nancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…sitting at home, watching tv, and relaxing” Jim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…day dreaming” Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…TOUGH…LIKE SOMETHING HARD” Izabella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…eating my favorite chocolate bar!” Destiny</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 12. Student Similes About Reading.*

Jim and Robert’s were refreshing because they both had positive undertones; it was clear that the boys were enjoying reading, even if they didn’t come right out and say it in class. Similarly, it was nice to hear from Nancy, and the image of the flower blossoming was a perfect articulation of her improvement in class; she had begun as a quiet, non-reader, but became engrossed in *The Lovely Bones* and was making significant progress in expressing her ideas.

Then there was the comment from Jeremy, who likened reading to “day dreaming.” At first I thought that he was enjoying reading and discussing
visualizing. Instead, in my member check, I discovered that he was still using his independent reading time to daydream and was not staying focused. As I reviewed his metacognitive log, I found that it was underdeveloped, with short answers that generally had nothing to do with his book. He was still doing his “I was distracted by…” or “I was thinking about…” even after we had picked a new book for him. However, his other comments on his survey were positive. He had liked the Teenage Driving reading, and he felt that discussing in class had helped him most; he was quite verbal in our class discussions, so I decided I would temporarily have to live with the fact that he did not like his book again. We would be moving onto magazines for independent reading soon, and I hoped the change in genre would catch his interest.

**Purpose? What’s a Purpose?**

I knew that my students wanted to read about things that mattered to them: teenagers. However, I didn’t want to simply have them read about the experiences of other American teenagers. I wanted to build their background knowledge so that when they left me they would have a larger schema to use when reading. I began searching and found a plethora of articles about teenage issues on Scholastic’s *Upfront Magazine* website. I perused a few articles and eventually found a pair of articles about Saudi Arabian teenagers: one written about the experience of male teenagers and the other about female teenagers.
Intriguing, I thought! I would love to see what they think of the ability to date in a foreign country! I knew it would be an engaging topic, but I wasn’t quite sure how to present the two articles so that students would be forced to monitor their comprehension, rather than simply reading and discussing aloud. Teams, I thought. Boys vs. Girls. The girls can read about the experience of girls and the boys about boys. They can annotate as they read, and develop questions for the other team! Great! This will help them read critically and continue to work on developing questions.

When I presented the activity to my students, they initially seemed excited. I told them our purpose was to compare teenage life in America to teenage life in Saudi Arabia. They were initially shocked, confused, and hooked. I separated the room into two discussion groups. The eight girls present occupied the rectangle of desks on the right side of the room, while the eight boys were in the same formation on the left side of the room. I read the directions from their task sheet: “Today you will be reading a current article from Upfront Magazine, which is a branch of The New York Times about the experience of teenagers in Saudi Arabia. Your job will be to develop six questions about your article that will be answered by the other team when we switch articles tomorrow.” I then added something to the effect of: “It will be up to your group to decide what pre-reading and during reading strategies you should use to monitor your comprehension. Remember to set a purpose for reading, and then maintain that
focus while you read. You have the duration of the block to read, re-read, and develop your questions. I will be sitting in on your conversations and taking notes about your discussion, as usual.” I smiled, and they nodded, before beginning to set up a plan in their groups.

I spent time with the boys first, knowing they could be more easily distracted. I reminded them to start with some kind of pre-reading activity, and I was met by blank faces. Oh no. I asked them what we did before we read anything new in class. They said exactly what I had taught them, “We look at the text boxes and questions.” Yes. That’s true. I did teach you to do that. But there were no questions, so I asked them what we did when there were no questions. Blank faces. Oh no…this is not good. “Well, I said, what do you know about Saudi Arabian teens?” Blank stares…nothing. “Ok, then what do you know about American relationships? Start by making a connection.” How could my boys not remember to start with prior knowledge?

I got up to move over to the girls because I needed to know if they were having the same or similar struggles. As I joined them, they seemed to be completely off task, talking about a new boy in school. I quickly reminded them that they were to be focused on the task. Izabella replied, “Oh miss. We were talkin bout relationships that girls have and then we started talkin bout this new boy. He is mad fine. Sorry. We gonna do it. Swear.” I tried to get them refocused and asked them to identify their purpose for reading. Janice replied, “to write
questions for the other team.” Oh no. That was the assignment not the purpose for reading. Had my directions mislead them? “Not quite,” I countered, “you should be trying to compare the experience of female teens in Saudi Arabia to that of your own experiences.” I got some nods of understanding, but I wasn’t convinced they knew why they should do so.

“Ok, everyone. I need to pull you all back together for a few minutes. I see that you are struggling to pre-read and set your purpose. So let’s talk about it. What about this has been difficult for you, besides being with friends?”

Janice: Well I thought we were just trying to write questions.

John: There weren’t any questions to read, so I didn’t know how to start.

Izabella: Yeah, Miss. You teach us to look at the questions first, but when there aren’t any, the girls [group] like started to read and then we started talking about the guy that this girl likes and then we started talkin bout the new boy that Destiny likes.

Me: Well, I am really sorry about this. I didn’t realize that we had become so reliant on using the questions to set our purpose. Any ideas of how else you could set your purpose for this?

Lenny: Well, Miss, you told my group to think about how relationships are for us. We talked about like how we get a girl.
Me: Yes, that’s great, and that was to set up your purpose so you could compare your life to the teens in Saudi Arabia. If I hadn’t told you, how might you have figured it out?

Keri: I can’t do it, Miss. I can’t do it without you or the questions. This is why I do bad at reading.

Me: Keri, this is a tough skill, and it is the beginning of the monitoring process. I think we should definitely add it to our list of steps. Anyone else who can help us figure out how you could set your purpose?

Nancy: Well, it says on the task sheet: “Relationships in America vs. Relationships in Saudi Arabia”

Destiny: And it says in the italics on the article that they have very strict rules about dating and stuff, not like us.

Me: Good. Those were definitely two good places to look. Any other suggestions?

John: The text box at the top that says it’s about the different experiences of other cultures.

Me: Also good. So once we figure out our purpose, what should you do to build your schema, or background knowledge?

Dominic: Talk about talking to girls in America, like you told us to. But now I would know to do that.
Janice: Yeah, it’s easy now because you told us. But I don’t know if I could do it on another one.

Me: I worry about that, too. I don’t want to be monitoring your comprehension for you; I want you to be able to do it on your own so that when you leave me you are able to do it. I promise you we will get better at this. I will add activate prior knowledge and set purpose to our list, so we start to remember. Let’s add it now. Our additions are shown in Figure 13.

**Revised During Reading Checklist**

1. Use the text features! Pre-read the directions, topic box, title, author, end notes

2. Set a purpose for reading:
   - Create a comparison
   - Pre-read questions
   - Use text features

3. Activate schema! What do you know?

4. Annotate the text during reading
   - Paraphrase
   - Predict
   - Ask evaluative questions

**Figure 13. Revised During Reading Checklist**

With our revised list on the board, I decided we should continue the activity the next day. Instead of continuing to read, the students wrote exit slips about their initial struggles and then provide potential solutions. I wanted to reinforce how to set a purpose and activate prior knowledge.
While I was happy with our new list of steps, I knew that my students were doing other great things while they were reading, and I wanted to give them more options for reading strategies to use while reading. I used our new chart to create a “During Reading Checklist” (Appendix G). This checklist had all of our 4 steps above, as well as a few more suggestions to be an active reader that would help my students. I photocopied the checklist on bright orange paper, and distributed one to each student. We stapled them to the inside of our portfolios to be used as a reference at all times. Even though they were bright and easily accessible, I realized that my students would not use them unless I modeled the use of the checklist, so every time we approached a new article in the coming days, I pulled out my checklist, prompting my students to do the same. Later in the week, I asked them to reflect on the use of the checklists on a survey. The students had to rank the usefulness of the checklists as a guide to comprehension monitoring. 16 students took the survey. Of the 16 students, 8 ranked it “really helps me” 5 ranked it “helps me” and 3 ranked it “I’m so good I don’t need it!” All three of the “I’m so good I don’t need it” responses were made by my strongest students: Izabella, Destiny, and Keri, who were using comprehension monitoring without needing a reminder every day. Overall, I was pleased with the early impact of the checklist.
**Mid-course Reflections: A Segue**

It took about a week for my students to feel comfortable with setting a purpose for their reading. By that time, it was the middle of the course and time for a midterm reflective essay. For the midterm reflection, I asked each student to write an essay tracking his or her progress using evidence from the portfolio. Together we brainstormed a list of the skills we had been working on in class. My students, with little prompting from me, were able to come up with many different skills and activities that we had been working on in class. Once everything was on the blackboard, we categorized the skills to create a sense of organization, as shown in Figure 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Independent Reading</th>
<th>Critical Reading</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic Sentence</td>
<td>Reading longer</td>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
<td>Setting Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLARITY!</td>
<td>Enjoying</td>
<td>TtT</td>
<td>Current Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Noticing Distractions</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>Metacognitive Logs</td>
<td>Pre-reading</td>
<td>Reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Length</td>
<td>Eliminating Answers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Focusing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“To Do” List</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Text Features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 14. Categorizing Improvements*

I was particularly interested by their creation of the “Other” category. Since we had just spent so much time on learning how to set a purpose with a wide variety of critical reading articles, I was surprised that they listed “Setting Purpose”
under other. I thought for sure they would have put it under “Critical Reading.” However, when negotiating its placement, John clearly pointed out that we need to set a purpose every time we read. *I beamed. I smiled. I probed:* “Great John. I need someone to give me examples of a different purpose we might have.”

Below are their responses:

*Destiny: Reading for fun…like our books*

*PJ: …or magazines or on the computer.*

*Keri: To know what is going on [in the world]…the news articles we read.*

*Janice: For all the reading we do about comparing us to other countries.*

*Izabella: For tests…like the Samplers we have to do.*

*Jim: Or for learning…like my EMT book for tech.*

*Dominic: Texts, Facebook… (laughter)*

*Me: Haha. Ok, what’s our purpose for that?*

*Dominic: Just to see what our friends are doin or what we gonna do on when we get outta school.*

So it was clear; they had come to understand that setting a purpose occurred every time they read. I was glad that they knew they had to set a purpose for everything, and we had moved beyond the idea of just setting a purpose when
taking a test. I was also so pleased that only one comment revolved around test prep. While I knew that we had done a lot of test prep the first two weeks, I had been making a conscious effort to make critical reading applicable to real world reading situations. Only one student mentioned test prep at all; the other 6 comments all discussed other types of reading.

While my students were at lunch, I typed up and photocopied the list we had created, and placed it on top of each student’s portfolio. When they returned I explained their mid-term assignment. I told them they would need to answer three questions: 1) How have you strengthened your reading skills according to the goals you set? 2) What other successes have you had along the way? 3) What would you still like to work on in this course? I stressed to them that they would need to justify their answers to each question by providing specific evidence from their portfolios. Since I knew that they had not written a lengthy reflection like this before, I modeled how I would approach the situation in a manner similar to this. “First, I would take a look back at my initial survey and the goals we set together. Then, I would look at all of the critical readings we have done, and pull out the one that you felt most successful with. What about that particular reading made you feel successful? What made it easy for you to relate to or understand? Then, I would look at something I did not enjoy as much. What about it was so hard? Why didn’t I like that particular article or topic? I would also search back through your computer metacognitive log. Check your reading
times. Have you been able to read longer? Have your responses gotten longer? More detailed? Then look at your most recent survey. How has your comfort level changed? I am here to help you analyze your progress. I will be meeting with you each individually as we write today and tomorrow.” That was all the modeling I needed to give to start the process. I knew that questions would arise as we wrote, but I wanted them to start searching, analyzing, and thinking before I lost their interest.

The two days of writing went fairly well, and I was ecstatic that I got to spend some one-on-one time with each of my students again to cheer them on and show them their progress even if they were unable to see it. The layered story in Figure 15 shows my interpretation of some of the students’ feelings about beginning the reflection process.

There were quite varying feelings about having to write reflectively about their progress thus far, as I had expected. I figured that Jeremy would be negative from the very first moment. I knew he loathed “thinking about thinking,” so I anticipated “writing about thinking” would be no different. I knew I needed to sit with him first to get him on the right track. I wanted him to vent his concerns all at once because I often found that he needed to get all the negativity out before doing work. I sympathized with him. He has never been successful with reading and had a difficult time seeing the value of reading critically. In order to help him, I had picked a few articles about skateboarding to grab his attention. When
Layered Story of Student Reflection Process

Jeremy: I can’t believe she is making me write about what I have learned. Why can’t I just read and be done with it? Why do I always have to analyze what I am thinking and why? I don’t even know what I got better at. I don’t really care what I got better at. All I care about is skateboarding after school today with my friends and fixing cars at tech. I don’t need to read, and I am only doing it so my parents don’t take my phone away again.

Keri: I don’t mind writing this because it’s like writing in my journal, and I do that every day, but usually it’s about friends and boys, not books. I used to think I was a good reader just because I read library books all the time, but that was just reading for fun. I didn’t ever bother to think about it or question it, but now I am asking questions in my log about what the people in the story are doing. I still don’t know how to make myself read stuff I don’t want to, but Fiske says I have to write my number 3 about that, so I have got to look at my portfolio and find a way.

Jim: I hate writing. I hate writing. I thought this was a reading class, anyways. You said this is just like writing those journals, but it’s not. I don’t mind setting goals. I don’t mind reading the current events stuff and I don’t mind giving my opinion about that stuff in my journals, but I don’t want to, can’t write a whole paper about it. I am looking at my surveys like you told me to, and I can see from my log that I read longer, a lot longer, but I can’t write it down.

Destiny: I have never had to think like this before so it is hard for me to start. I want to write a good paper because I want to get an “A.” It’s easy when Fiske is here because she shows me what to look at, but when she is not here I get lost. She tells me to “start with what I know” and that is that I actually like to read about other teenagers like we have been, especially the kids in Africa, and I wrote that on my survey, so maybe that’s where I start.

John: This is easy for me because I know I got better at independent reading. At first I didn’t know where to start either, I was stuck, but then Fiske reminded me that I read 4 whole pages at home on my own in my book last week. I also read this weekend, too, on the way to NJ, and on my first survey I said that I never finished a whole book.

Figure 15. Layered Story of Student Reflection Process
he was done venting, I reminded him about those articles, and it eventually helped to find a starting point for him to begin writing.

Like Jeremy, Jim often had a hard time seeing the relevance of reading critically. Also a vo-tech student, reading for him was only useful when it came from a manual that would help him become a better EMT. Unlike Jeremy, he was willing to do the work, but he legitimately did not know how to start. Writing was a serious struggle for him, so I helped him create an outline as I interviewed him. I let him watch me transform his verbal answers into an organized outline for a paper.

I also knew that many of my students, such as Destiny and John, would be initially stuck. They just needed something to start with, just as I often needed help (a brilliant student comment or a work sample) to get started with my own papers. I carefully prompted them to reflect on some of the comments they had made to me verbally or in their surveys as a starting point.

Keri, on the other hand, was a whole different case. I knew that she would not object to writing; instead, I needed her to slow down and think. I forced her to address the issue that she still was cruising through non-fiction articles, both teen articles and Samplers, as if they were independent reading novels. I also knew that she was a good writer and could potentially write a good paper that had real analysis in it. She knew how to play school, and she could fabricate ways that she had improved; however, I was demanding the evidence to
back it up, which held her accountable for critically thinking about her own progress.

Writing reflections was no easy task, but it was definitely worthwhile for the students and me. For them, it put into perspective how much they had grown. There was not one student, including Jeremy, who did not ultimately find some progress towards goals. In addition, it helped them to refocus their goals for the remainder of the course. The consensus was unanimous: they had a strong handle on how to approach a test, could read longer, and were able to question. More importantly, they made a subtle silent plea to read “more of those articles about other teens and current events” than those silly Samplers. For me, it put into perspective the fact that, sure, I had done what the course was designed to do “help students pass the PSSA,” but I also had them curious about other cultures through reading; that was my real goal all along. I added my vote to the consensus; it was time to move on.

A “Novel” Idea

With the second quarter beginning, new goals set, and test prep accomplished, I was so excited to introduce the novel I had selected for the course: A Long Way Gone by Ishmael Beah. I knew that they would be hooked quickly since I had been secretly frontloading with current event articles about the situation of child soldiers in African countries. I was also eager to see how
well they would be able to transfer their comprehension monitoring skills to a lengthy work.

**Pre-reading: Building background knowledge and setting a purpose.**

To begin, I gave the students an opportunity to build their background knowledge by exploring the author’s website and listening to him speak. In order to make them accountable for their comprehension, they used the knowledge they found to create newsletters about Beah. We discussed types of strategies to use while browsing the internet, since they could not annotate articles, and decided that bulleting important facts would be most useful to then create mini-articles.

After the newsletters were created, we used the information we found to set a purpose for reading. I asked students to browse their findings and determine what they really wanted to discover about Ishmael’s life as a child soldier. Different students chose to focus on different topics. Some of their choices are below.

- **Izabella, Janice, Destiny:** *The impact of being a soldier on his family life*
- **Emily, Nancy, PJ:** *His emotional problems during and after the war*
- **Lenny, Jeremy, John, Robert, Frank:** *The violence of the war*
- **Keri, Danny, Jim:** *How he was brainwashed into fighting*
Because we had a variety of purposes for reading, I explained to them that some of our annotations in the text would most likely be very different, but some would be very similar. We brainstormed a list (shown in Figure 16) of annotations that would be similar and some that would be different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similar:</th>
<th>Different:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plot summaries/events</td>
<td>Connections to purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Themes related to purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Elements (Irony,</td>
<td>Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreshadowing, Imagery)</td>
<td>Roadblocks (both?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author’s Style</td>
<td>Emotions and Feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16. Similarities and Differences for Various Reading Purposes

I was impressed with the lists they developed because it clearly showed that all students should be able to identify the major events, characters, and literary quality of the memoir. At the same time, they understood that the questions being written, the connections, and inferences would be more likely to be particular to their purpose for reading. We ultimately decided that “roadblocks” could fall into both categories because some students might face similar roadblocks, such as vocabulary or sentence length; however, the roadblocks could also be different if the students were having trouble connecting to their purpose for reading. With this list created, I believed that we were ready to dive into the novel.
**During reading: Back to basics.** I was so inspired by the lists of various annotations that my students were ready to make to monitor their comprehension that I forgot how difficult it was for my students to transfer their skills between genres. On the day we began reading, I distributed the novels and we opened to the first page. I was so excited. I began reading aloud to model how I would annotate the first page. I stopped as each character was introduced and wrote down names, recorded the setting, and made predictions about the flashback that would be happening shortly. I also stopped to figure out the context of a few African words. My students followed my lead and wrote down exactly what I did. *This is going well, I thought. Maybe this won’t be so difficult after all.* After reading the opening section, I sent the kids off to read silently for 10 minutes until lunch. I expected to see them monitoring their comprehension as I had modeled, but that is certainly not what I viewed in the next ten minutes. All I saw was the turning of pages, no annotations: no summaries, no questions, no connections, no cry for help. Nothing. I knew I was in trouble. I wrote in my field log at lunch. *I am not sure what just happened. I expected my students to follow my lead and monitor their comprehension with annotations, but I did not see that. I think the only one who marked anything was Destiny. Where did I go wrong? Did I forget to tell them to use their strategies? I thought I reminded them of the list we came up with yesterday.* What I had initially failed to realize
was that I was doing all the work for them while I was modeling, but I never
gave them the chance to practice with me before sending them off to read on
their own. I had missed that crucial guided reading practice. Luckily, I had lunch
to reflect on my terrible introduction of the novel. After lunch, I apologized to
the students for not properly scaffolding independent comprehension monitoring.
We went back to where they had started reading, and I asked Destiny, one of my
better monitors, to read aloud and share her monitoring process. I asked her to
remind us of her purpose and she had selected to focus on relationships and his
family life. She made the following comments: “It seems like these boys are his
family. He has a dad and a step mom. He lives with his mom. He has 2 brothers.
One is little and they play soccer.” When she stopped at the break, I asked the
other students what they noticed about Destiny’s think aloud. Thankfully, they
noticed that her comments were about the family members that he mentions.
Destiny did exactly what I needed her to do. She introduced the characters that
would be essential to her linking to her purpose for reading.

Jeremy volunteered to go second, and his purpose was to look for the
impact of the violence. Jeremy read from start to finish of the next section
without stopping once. When I asked him why he didn’t “think aloud” he said
that nothing was about violence. It was true, the section Jeremy read had very
little mention of violence; I asked him if there were maybe important plot events
he should write down. He said, “I don’t think so. Not yet because we didn’t meet
no one new and they are just walkin’ around.” I agreed and let him continue reading, knowing that the next section would be incredibly violent. However, when he reached the part about the shooting, he didn’t stop to comment. I allowed him to finish before asking him about his choice not to comment. He replied, “I wanted to read the whole thing first because it was really cool. You know like he says it’s that *Rambo* movie. Then I forgot to say anything afterwards. “ I reminded him that this is why we must force ourselves to stop, so we don’t forget. This provided a great teaching opportunity.

Finally, during the last 10 minutes of class I decided that it would be okay to let them read on their own and continue for homework. I asked them to have one comment per page to show me the next day.

**During reading…quality over quantity.** As my students continued to read in the coming days, I noticed that their comments were gradually becoming weaker. They were regressing back to “he’s stupid” or “I don’t like that” or “that’s gross” instead of being quality comments that connected, questioned, or identified roadblocks. It became increasingly difficult for me to tell if they were even reading the book. It was time for a class meeting. I asked everyone to put their stickies from the previous night on their desk. Then, I told them to get up and sit at another person’s desk. Once there, the students had to read the
comments on the desk and try to figure out how far in the book that person was. Within seconds, there was an outrage of confusion.

“I can’t tell, Miss.”

“This don’t tell me that.”

“How am I supposed to know?”

When I probed them to tell me more about why they didn’t know, the students revealed that the comments didn’t reference any events; they were simply emotions or reactions. I reminded them that their annotations needed to be linked to their purpose or mark important plot points for them to be useful. I told them it was going to be important for them to be able to go back and find specific parts after we finished reading for their projects.

Again, I needed to model good comments. “It’s gross because…they cut off his limbs. Now that shows the violence!” “I don’t like him because he deserted the groups. Now that shows family disloyalty!” It was fine for them to pass judgment but they needed to use the evidence in the text to support their shallow claims.

When the students returned to their original seats, they revised their stickies, so they would remember why they had written certain comments long after we had finished the book. Figure 17 shows a recreation of 2 sets of the original and revised stickies that PJ made.
When I sat with PJ to work on these, we tried to focus on how the stickies would help us later. Because he was focusing on the emotional issues after the war, he decided that hearing the music after the war would really affect him. He also realized that his memories of escape might contribute to his flashbacks after the war ended. There were other stickies of PJ’s that we completely eliminated. For example, he had a sticky that read “Mad funny” that related to the boys dancing; he decided that event would most likely fail to help him in the future. Like PJ, the students quickly realized that many of their post-its were unnecessary because they did not link to their purpose or a major event. We threw those stickies away, and put the quality stickies back in the book for later use.

**During reading...What is really important?** Even after our mini-lesson on writing valuable stickies, students still had a difficult time recording important events. Jim wrote in his reflective journal: *I forget to stop because there is so much goin on and it happens so fast. Like when Ishmael gets caught*
and then the gunfire starts. He gets away and then he is running so far. I didn’t stop till it was all over. But then class was over and I forgot to write down what I read and then today I forgot about what happened. The issue seemed to be more common in class than I had realized. Dominic wrote: What happens to the old guy is mad crazy. The dogs are eating him and then Ishmael gets caught but he gets away because of the army that comes and then he loses his brother. I was just reading and then it was time to go. I remember today what happened but not everything. It was clear—as they got more wrapped up in the story line, they forgot to stop and make notes. Part of me was excited that they were so into the story, but I needed to harness that excitement and help them to see that it was still important to stop and monitor their comprehension so that they didn’t forget the next day. I also realized that this was partly my fault, too. I needed to model having the time for reflection and stop class a few minutes earlier. I had gotten away from my original schedule that included closure. I needed to follow my own schedule to ensure that my students had the necessary time to reflect on what they had read.

Even with time built in for reflection, some of my students still did not write quality annotations that showed me they were able to monitor their comprehension. I became increasingly frustrated that some of my students could not use their stickies or notes to go back and find major events or significant quotes to reference during class discussions. I felt that in too many instances I
was doing all of the work: asking questions, finding the examples they were mentioning, and calling out page numbers. I wrote in my field log: *No matter what I seem to do, Jeremy, Lenny and Dominic are not taking the time to write down important events. They are more than capable of telling me what they think of the story and giving examples from the book, but they can never find them. Their answers are not speculative, but they are not completely rooted in the text either. I need them to be able to find the places to reference so the rest of the class can learn with them.* I was frustrated that I could not get through to some of my students, and we were at the halfway point of the novel. I decided that I needed to come up with another approach to have them remember important quotes or events that proved to me they were monitoring their comprehension and understanding the text. After each chapter, I had students illustrate the most important event that related to their theme or purpose for reading. Some photographs of these are below in Figure 18.

Students spent quite a bit of time on these illustrations and were proud of their work. Janice especially enjoyed creating them, and she often took them home to finish, which was unlike her. She commented, “I like drawing them because I like art, and I can get a picture in my head. And then I can make the pictures like symbols of stuff and I remember it.” I almost jumped for joy when she announced this to the class, as it was exactly the point of the on-going activity.
Figure 18. Student Quote Representations

“We Burned About three Villages Today.”

These days I live in three worlds: my dreams, and the experience of my new life, which trigger memories from the past.” (20)
The quote illustrations of the important events were actually very useful for some of my students who were having difficulty remembering to write down specific events. By taking the time to decide how to illustrate them, actually drawing them, and then presenting them, they were naturally committed to memory. We continued to add quotes to our blackboard for the remainder of the book to help students remember specific events.

**During reading: A success story.** As we progressed much further into the novel, I began to notice some major improvements in the quality of their stickies. Izabella’s comments changed significantly throughout the novel. Figure 19 shows her development of critical reading throughout the novel.

She began identifying her roadblocks, since she often struggles with vocabulary. Her early comments dealt specifically with the vocabulary: “What is cassava?” “What are crapes?” She knew she needed to build necessary background information about Sierra Leone, so she focused on those words that provided important background information that would be crucial to understanding the novel. As she mastered the author’s writing style and some of the African words, she moved to comments such as, “I never knew…” or “I can’t believe…”, which showed she was trying to make connections to the main ideas of the memoir. Clearly, she understood the importance of identifying the important events and marking them in the text. As she became more connected to her topic of his family life and life after the war, she progressed to comments
such as “I don’t think it is fair that he was a soldier,” and “I wonder if he’ll ever be able to get over what happened.” Here she was able to empathize with the author and even evaluate the ethics of forcing children to be soldiers.

Izabella and I discussed her progression in an interview, and we talked about the progression of her comments. We discussed that her approach to

**Figure 19. Izabella’s Cycle of Understanding**

Izabella and I discussed her progression in an interview, and we talked about the progression of her comments. We discussed that her approach to
reading had become consistent, and she had established a process for breaking down a text that worked for her. The following is a reconstruction of her interview response:

“It’s like I have to start with the little stuff. I have to get how the author is writing….his style. I didn’t know too much about Africa, so I needed to get used to the words in Africa, like the “cassava” food. Then, I started to get it, so I wrote down more of what I thought about Ishmael, like the main ideas or things he did: got caught, escaped, lost his family, got rescued.

But I started to get really mad at some of the stuff so I wrote E….e….evaluative questions. I was so mad that he was made to be a soldier. He shoulda got to choose like we do unless there’s that draft. I guess as I get the text more, I, like, connected more to it. I really like when that happens, but it takes me a long time. I feel like I do it now with everything I read and it helps me. I gotta start small, get the idea, and then I can question and stuff. It’s like you call it, Miss, a cycle.

Not only was I ecstatic that she had developed a way to process reading that worked for her, but she was using the language that we were using in class: writing style, main idea, evaluative questions, cycle of reading. He verbal expression of her own reading process showed me that she had been practicing metacognition; she had been thinking about her reading process, identified what she needed to do to understand text, and was regularly using those methods the
process that worked for her. In other words, she had learned, quite successfully, to monitor her own comprehension.

The quality of responses that the students were making at this point in the novel helped them to become excellent discussers in class as well. I found myself being less of a discussion director and more of a facilitator. Their quote drawings, annotations with important quotes and evaluative questions gave them much more to talk about in our circles. In one particular discussion circle, John actually brought up the idea of the corrupt adults in the memoir. He was angry that “grown ups could think it was okay to make kids fight.” He showed everyone the quote that angered him, and he was met with several responses from other students of passages that had evoked similar responses. They were able to keep discussion going for an entire 17 minutes without any direction from me. I commented and gave my opinion on quotes, but I never had to restart conversation or introduce another quote. I was pleased with this discussion, but I found myself sad that we had almost reached the conclusion of the book. I wrote in my field log: *I can’t believe my students discussed today without my lead. They all seemed prepared and wanted to say something. I only wish it wasn’t the end of the book. I wanted to have these discussions all along. I wonder what I could have done differently to make them involved and prepared earlier.* Eventually I realized that I probably couldn’t have done anything differently. They needed all this time to practice monitoring their comprehension and
understanding the book so we could have this final discussion. They were finally connecting to the novel and their purpose enough to be able to make positive contributions to the discussions. While it may not have happened until the end, I was grateful to have experienced at least one good discussion before they left me in the coming weeks.

**Comprehension Comes Alive**

I knew that my students were engrossed in *A Long Way Gone* and that they had become quite comfortable with monitoring their comprehension while reading a lengthy work. I didn’t want them to forget how to critically read short articles, so I decided it was time to weave in other shorter articles that complemented *A Long Way Gone* and challenged them to think about the harsh realities of war. This time, instead of finding articles for my students, I sent them to the *Upfront Magazine* websites to find articles that portrayed the struggles of war. I did not specify that they had to find articles about the war in Africa; instead, I wanted them to show me that they could find parallels between *A Long Way Gone* and other places. Each student had to read an article, summarize the key points and then relate it to the memoir on a power point slide. Immediately PJ, John, and Dominic found an article about “blood phones” on the welcome screen for the magazine. I was shocked, as I had not even seen the new article. I put article finding on hold temporarily and had all kids read the article and create their first secondary source slide. Figure 19 shows PJ’s and Dominic’s slides,
which were the fastest slides they had ever made for me. They were so passionate about the topic that we engaged in a whole class discussion of our possible impact on what could potentially become war in Africa.

Figure 19. P.J.’s and Dominic’s “Blood Phone” Slides
I was delighted by the quality of conversation of my students. I again did very little intervening as they mentioned specific parts from the memoir and pieces of the documentary on the war we had been watching in class. A reconstruction of the conversation, based on the notes I took in my field log, follows:

**PJ:** It would be mad crazy if another war like the one from the book and that movie started again. What about those kids? Remember how they made those kids kill those people to prove they could fight.

**John:** Yeah, that one kid pissed himself and then he was scared they were gonna kill him, but they let him become a soldier anyway in the movie.

**Izabella:** And if they had another war so many kids could die or be messed up real bad. Look how bad Ishmael was messed up in the book. He was doin drugs all the time.

**Jeremy:** Yeah the brown brown...dirty drugs. And then when they tried to re-patr....what’s that word, Miss?

**Destiny:** repatriate.

**Jeremy:** Yeah that, he couldn’t be like normal again because his family was dead and he was changed to a grown up.

**Keri:** Well I watched that whole blood diamond movie the one that Ms. Fiske said was like the real movie (documentary) we watched, and they did some really bad things to those people. They cut this guy’s
stomach out for trying to steal a diamond. He swallowed it, and then they cut him open.

Nancy: Ew, Keri.

Keri: Yeah, I know, but, like, what if the people had to look for the minerals like that.

Lenny: That’s the whole point. It could happen again. Right?

Me: Yes, it could, unfortunately. Would you be willing to give up your cell phone if it was really the start of a war?

Janice: I could do it. I’d still have facebook.

PJ: I would get a phone that wasn’t a smartphone…shoot, I can’t afford no smartphone anyway.

Keri: My phone is like my life, but I could give it up I guess and get one of those older phones.

The class continues discussion and agrees...move to older phones with no minerals.

Me: How many of you would join the facebook activist page mentioned in the article?

Many hands raise.

Lenny: I would, Miss, because I don’t think it’s right. I wouldn’t want those people to die just so I can get a cool phone.
Nancy: Me neither, Miss. I mean I don’t think they should die and
I would join the page. I am gonna check it out when I get home.

While this was just a sampling of the conversation, it was interesting to hear the
impact that *A Long Way Gone* had on their impressions of the issue with “blood
phones.” Clearly, they had opened their eyes and begun to develop compassion
for the people of Africa; finally they had a strong enough understanding of the
book we were reading and could compare it to the seriousness of the issue being
presented in the article.

In the coming days, and as we wrapped up the novel, students continued
to work on their slides for a slideshow. They found other articles that dealt with
the impact of war and commented on their connections to *A Long Way Gone*.
Some students had a more difficult time creating the slides, so the project took
much longer. Those students, such as Jeremy and Lenny, who struggled were the
same students who had not written clear annotations for themselves early in the
book. They had to spend a significant amount of time paging through the early
chapters to find specific events, whereas other students, like Destiny and
Izabella, who had written clear annotations had a much easier time of finding
everal events to connect with. Luckily, as Jeremy and Lenny found articles that
connected to later events in the novel after they had learned to write better
annotations, the creation of the slides became much easier. Jeremy’s and Lenny’s
best slides are shown in Figure 20. I was particularly proud of these two slides
because I did not have to help them make the connections at all. After co-writing several slides with them, they had finally figured out how to connect the ideas and express that connection in writing. My only role in these slides was that of proofreader in the publishing stage.

Figure 20. Best Slides: Jeremy and Lenny
“Seeing It All the Time, Like, Literally”

I spent a great deal of time analyzing student surveys before I planned the final two weeks of class. I realized I was seeing the same comment, written slightly differently: “The steps really help me” juxtaposed with “I forget to follow the steps when they aren’t in front of me.” I was relieved to know that the checklists were still helping but worried because the course was almost over, and most students still hadn’t committed the strategies for good readers to memory. I wrote in my field log: *Here we are at the end, and I feel like I have failed. Yes, they have definitely learned to be better readers, more critical thinkers, and more effective writers, but they just don’t seem ready to do it all on their own yet. I wish I could tape the checklists to the inside of their eyelids, without causing pain, of course. I just want them to close their eyes and envision it.* I was stuck, so I made a list of strategies I liked to use to remember information. Among the list was color-coding. I remembered how helpful it was to have the “During Reading Checklist” on neon orange paper; the brightness demanded their attention. *Eureka! An idea!*

I decided that I would break the student favorite “During Reading Checklist” and “Answering Questions List” into chunks and photocopy them on bright pieces of paper. Then, I would tape them onto the desks in the upper right hand corner since most of my students are right handed. I wanted them to be able to simply look above their book or hand to see them. On neon pink, I copied an
abbreviated “During Reading Checklist.” On neon green, I copied the “Answering Questions Checklist.”

I knew that simply taping them to the desk would not ensure that they were used, but I hypothesized that if I used them as a teaching tool, referenced them frequently, and scaffolded the use of them while reading that it would help students to remember to use them. In addition, I hoped that if students saw and used the checklists often enough that the reading strategies would gradually pass beyond short-term memory.

The bright colors were a pleasant surprise for the students when they walked in the room and shared a wide variety of comments shown in Figure 21. This Figure is modeled after the set up of the checklists on the desks.

Once my students got over the initial shock of the color, they seemed to be pleased by the idea of having the checklists on their desks. They knew that it was another of example of me simply trying to help them remember to monitor their comprehension while they were reading. It was nice to be thanked for putting them on the desk; I only wish I would have thought of it sooner.

Of course, not everyone could be positive about it. I was not surprised by Jeremy’s sarcastic comment: “You really are determined to make us use those things, aren’t you?” I needed to know more about what he meant, so I asked him to elaborate. He said something to the effect of “I know that I am going to have to use the strategies now. I can’t pretend I forgot anymore because they are right
He knew that with only 2 weeks left it was time to “man-up,” as he liked to say, and do the work to achieve his goals. I silently celebrated his long-overdue epiphany in my field log: 

*I have been so frustrated with Jeremy’s lack of desire to take charge of his learning; I was so afraid he was not going to ever come around. The implementation of the bright checklists has eliminated any*
excuses from him, and for that I am thankful. I also don’t think that the social pressure hurts. Since he is constantly seeing all of the other students working hard and using the checklists as a guide, he has begun to see more value in them. For the first time with Jeremy, I feel successful. I just wish the end of the course wasn’t so soon.

A Final “Sample”

Before the final exam, I wanted to give my students one final practice PSSA Item Sampler. We had not done one for almost three weeks since we had been focusing on our memoir, digital literacy, and articles about Africa. I feared already that they may have forgotten how to attack a passage and certainly didn’t want to set them up for failure on the final exam.

I was also afraid after our success with A Long Way Gone that they would hate to regress to such a meaningless article. I broached the topic very carefully and said something like: “I know it’s been a long time since we have done an Item Sampler, but we are going to do a short one after lunch. I know we are so close to finishing our book, but we really need to take a break from it today. I want you to remind me what fantastic passage attackers you are! It is a short passage, with only six questions. I know that you can do it, and I am counting on you to give me your best effort so we can continue on with the exciting conclusion of our book tomorrow... and I brought Halloween candy!” I paused,
closed my eyes, waited for whining, and then opened them to silence. No
whining? What is going on here? There certainly weren’t happy faces in front of
me, but no one made a big deal. Maybe it was the prospect of candy or maybe
Item Samplers weren’t so scary anymore. I needed to know, so when my
students returned from lunch I asked which it was. It wasn’t one or the other it
was both. The candy was the initial buy-in, not that I can blame them, but they
also said they weren’t scared of passages anymore. “Even though you haven’t
done one in a while?” I asked. A unanimous “no, not really” filled the room. I
have to say I was in shock, to the point where I was temporarily speechless.
Memories of the first week of school rushed into my brain, and I remembered all
of their comments: “I hate this.” “This sucks, Miss.” “It’s too hard.” “I can’t do
this.” Had we really made that much progress? When had I missed it? Had I
been so engrossed in our novel discussions, projects, and presentations that I
had missed their change in thought? I passed out the Samplers in silence and
reminded them to use their checklists on the table. “We know, Miss,” they said.
Ok, I thought. I hope this Sampler goes as well as they think it will. “Six Months
on Mir” is no easy Sampler.

Just as I had done when administering previous Samplers, I walked
around the room to help students stay focused. I clocked their time of focus, and
I watched the process that they were using. I wrote notes on my clipboard next to
times.
12:04: Everyone focused
12:06: Destiny and Nancy both annotate and pre-read questions. Use corner method to write purpose
12:09 PJ is distracted. I refocus him, but he says he doesn’t feel well. Not sure if it is an excuse.
12:11 Robert is annotating. Questions in margin.
12:13 Izabella is highlighting and paraphrasing like crazy.
12:19 Jeremy is almost finished. I see few annotations. Worried.
12:22 John is finished. Eliminating answers □
12:24 Dominic, Destiny, Nancy, Keri finished. Eliminating Answers
12:26 Janice, Izabella still on page 1. Worried about time
12:34 John is the first one completely finished. Goes back to check work.
12:35 Jeremy finished but does not check work. Puts his head down.
12:40 8 minutes remaining. Everyone is finished but Janice and Izabella.
    Will need to finish tomorrow probably. Thorough annotations.

It was clear that my students were much more engaged than at the beginning of the semester despite their particular lack of interest in the article. They had openly complained about reading about Space in the first four minutes of the sampler.

“I don’t care about what happened in Space 50 years ago.”

“This passage is mad old.”

“I swear they make them boring on purpose.” Their whining initially annoyed me, and it thankfully stopped when I reminded them that they knew how to make the best of it and to think of it as a challenge. After that there was no whining; it was replaced by serious work. When the room was quiet and I had time to think about their comments, I understood their aggravation with the boring passage; I sympathized with their frustration of boring passages, as we had spent much time agreeing that those boring passages were really the ones
that tested our ability to focus. After I jotted down their comments in my field log, I tried once again to model being focused even when not interested by completing the Sampler with them. I sat at a table with John, PJ, and Dominic and began following the stages of the checklist I had brought with me. I honestly think my modeling helped as the tension in the room lessened and they relaxed into the passage.

After seeing my students engaged for a full 40 minutes, I anticipated that their scores would be much better. However, I was much more excited to see evidence of the strategies that they had chosen to implement rather than their scores. I made a tally sheet of evidence of strategies (Table 2) that the students were reading as I went through their Samplers before I even looked to see how

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Used</th>
<th>Number of Instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrases with Highlighting</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Features/Predictions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page end Summaries</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminating Answers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stem Starters</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
many answers were correct. When I saw the final numbers I jumped for joy and then grabbed my field log: I can’t even believe what I am seeing. Did all 17 of my students actually selectively use 3 strategies?? I want to play devil’s advocate and say that they were playing school here, but I don’t think that is the case. I think they genuinely knew what to do and how to attack the passage. I am also thrilled that so many (12) of my students wrote worthwhile questions on their papers. Some of them were meaning questions, which they then clarified, but many others were evaluative. They were actually trying to understand the author’s purpose for writing since it was one of the questions in the multiple choice section. They actually used them as a guide. For the first time, I actually felt as though I had made an impact on their knowledge and understanding of how to monitor their comprehension while reading that would last even after they left my classroom. By the variety of strategies used, it was clear that some students had figured out which strategies worked best for them to attack this particular non-fiction passage.

The scores of the sampler were also much better, just as I had anticipated. With seven questions in the passage, the mean score was nearly five correct responses, and the median was four. While these numbers did not mean a whole lot to me, they certainly meant a lot to my students. When I returned their Samplers the following day, they were ecstatic about their scores. I asked them to compare their scores on this final sampler to their first one that we had done in
class. They wrote a journal reflecting on the significant differences in their use of comprehension monitoring. Some of their journal entries are shown in Figure 22.

I kinda laugh at what I did in the beginning. I didn’t really do anything and that’s why I did so bad. I didn’t really know what to write and I was so bored that I didn’t care. But now I use my checklist so I don’t get lost.

I feel really proud of myself. I got six of the questions right, and I didn’t even guess. It’s kind of funny to look at my first one. I think I just got so much better at everything, but mostly asking questions.

Figure 22: Student Journal Comments
It was amazing how many students were able to laugh at their beginning samples, when they had certainly been no laughing matter just eight weeks ago. Jeremy’s comment particularly struck me since I had struggled so much to help him want to read: “I guess I came a long way. I didn’t do nothing on that first one, and now I got four right. I think it is because I did it in little sections and I wrote down stuff about it.” While he wasn’t very specific in choosing his terminology, he had obviously been paraphrasing in manageable chunks to make sense. I cross-referenced his passage to make sure he wasn’t just writing something down to make me happy, and I was quite pleased to see that he really had paraphrased in the margin.

**The Fairy Tale Ending (almost)**

On the last day of the course, I distributed one more survey almost identical to the survey at the beginning of the course (Appendix I). Students then went into their portfolios and got out their first survey. I wanted them to be able to compare the results of their first survey with the results of the final survey so that they might see their own significant progress. Table 3 shows the comparison between the number of students who regularly used a strategy at the beginning of the course and the number of students who regularly used a strategy at the end of the course.
Table 3. Comparison Between First and Last Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When I am I reading…</th>
<th>Student Responses Survey 1</th>
<th>Student Responses Survey 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask, &quot;Does this make sense?&quot;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express the difference of understanding.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express awareness of what the content means.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express doubt about understanding</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask &quot;Where did I lose track?&quot;</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the place where I began to lose track</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use stem-starters to stay focused.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reread.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read on and try to clear up the confusion.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute words I know .</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make mind pictures to &quot;see&quot; in my head</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect what I am reading</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask myself questions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the numbers clearly changed between the first survey and the last survey, I wanted to ensure that students weren’t simply trying to make me happy by
claiming that they did all of these things while reading; it had been 9 weeks, and we had really bonded as a class, so I knew I needed to do a member check to ensure the validity of the results they reported. It was time for a class discussion. I decided to start positively:

   Me: Ok gang, I need some feedback from you. I want to know what was really helpful for you over the past 9 weeks.

   Izabella: A lot, Miss. I think those Item Sampler things helped me most because I never knew what to do. I didn’t like to do them, but it helped.

   John: My favorite thing was the soldier book. It was so interesting and it helped me write better stickies so I could remember.

   PJ: I think both helped me. I didn’t like the Samplers, but I need to do good on the PSSA, so now I think I will. And the book was crazy.

   Nancy: I liked when we wrote about what we were getting good at. It made me feel better about reading.

   Jim: This class made me do better in English because my teacher wants us to TttT all the time and now I know how.

   Lenny: Yeah my teacher is serious about that annotating. “Read smarter, not harder” has been on her door all year. Now I finally get it. I got to be smarter when I read, like I need to know what to do. Instead of making it harder by not stopping and getting to the end.
Me: I love that thought. It is exactly what it means. I am so glad it finally makes sense to you.

Janice: I liked drawing the quotes. It helped me remember more.

Keri: I liked the articles about teenagers. There were so many and now I feel like I know more about those people. It makes me feel...like...smart.

Dominic: I liked everything, except that test in the beginning. I thought everyday was gonna be like that but it wasn’t.

Jeremy: I like the soldier book and talking about it. I liked when the whole class talked about stuff. It made more sense then.

Danny: I think those practice Samplers were good. It made me focus more and now I can do better with them and not get bored.

Frank: I liked *A Long Way Gone*. I don’t usually like books, but that one was interesting.

Emily: I just liked everything. When I got bored with one thing we were going to something different. It was always something new.

Me: Okay, now I see that on your surveys, you guys checked off a lot more things that you do while you read now. Is this really true, or are you trying to make me happy? I won’t be mad if you want to revise them.

(Laughter).
Keri: Well, I really do that, Miss. You’ve been telling me to do it for 9 freaking weeks.

Destiny: Yeah, Miss. You kind of like beat it into us. But not in a bad way. I just do it now.

Me: Jeremy, how about you? I know you haven’t always enjoyed being an active reader.

Jeremy: I don’t know. I tried to be honest. I still don’t do that questioning, but at least I ask or stop when I don’t get it.

Me: Thanks for your honesty. Anyone else?(Heads shake no)

Me: So would you recommend this class to a tenth grader?

PJ: Yeah, Miss. Especially if they do bad in English or reading.

Lenny: Yeah, because at least I get reading more now and it was short.

Me: Thanks for your feedback guys. I might need your help in a few weeks because they are eliminating this course with the budget cuts.

Would you be willing to help me fight for it? All heads nod…it’s unanimous.

I couldn’t believe that our time had come to an end. Our final conversation was so positive, and I hated to let them go. They had been honest, even when I didn’t like what they had to say, throughout the entire course. Now, at the end, they
were honest that they felt successful. I knew that they were successful, too, and many of them had grown by leaps and bounds. I wrote my final log entry: *We made quite a journey together, and as they walked out my door today, I felt an immense sadness. These kids had invested so much time in helping me with my study, and I am so grateful for their hard work. I only hope that they learned as much from me, as I learned from them.*
Data Analysis

Introduction

The task of collecting worthwhile, useful data that will help a researcher to formatively, and eventually summatively, assess the action research plan is no easy task. While conducting the study, the piles of raw data—interviews, surveys, participant observations, reflections, etc.—can quickly grow. Before the importance of that raw data is lost or forgotten, the researcher must attempt to make meaning of it. Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul (1997) remind researchers “[t]here is no way as human beings that we can not analyze” (p. 161). Analyzing data is natural for our curious kind and is an integral element of the research process.

The Cycle of Data Analysis

Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul (1997) contend that “qualitative analysis requires that the researcher go back again and again over the accumulated log material in a process that has a cyclical feel” p. (175). As data are collected, the researcher needs to be constantly analyzing these data for patterns and trends that both inform teaching and curriculum design. In addition, data analysis needs to be on-going and done throughout the duration of the study. In fact, the data analysis process does not ever truly end, even after the story has been written and the conclusions drawn. Instead, the conclusions and findings only help the teacher
researcher to make plans for a new semester and a new set of students that will inevitably generate a new set of data to be analyzed.

**Ongoing Analysis**

After few days of school, I had already found myself overwhelmed with piles of student surveys, interview responses, pre-tests, and notes from my field log. After the initial “I don’t know where to start wore off,” I remembered the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (2003) to explore data early and not to be afraid to speculate. I made the conscious decision to select methods of analysis early on and then continued to use those methods throughout my study.

**Field Log Analysis**. My field log started as my own personal place to journal (or vent) about my beliefs, frustrations, or inadequacies. It then grew to house my participant observations, student work, survey and interview data, and diagnostic tests. However, my field log notes were not in any way comprehensible for a reader other than me, who could manage to follow seas of arrows, scribbles, faces, and horrific penmanship. I decided to organize my field log into sections rather than chronologically so that I could begin to see patterns among specific types of data. I created the following sections: Observations, Surveys and Interviews, Student Work, Diagnostic Tests, and Other. In order to analyze these
sections I completed the following: Reflective Memos, Tally Sheets and Graphs, Coding, and a Mid-Study Memo.

**Reflective memos.** I was careful each day to record student comments, behaviors, and important events related to my study on the left hand side of a two column chart. After class, or at lunch, I filled in the second column to reflect upon my initial interpretations. At the end of each day, I reviewed my sheet of notes from the class and tried to write a more thorough analysis of what had happened in class that was relevant to my study. Furthermore, writing reflective memos helped me follow the wisdom of Bogdan and Biklen (2003) and further “plan data collection in light of what [I found]” (p. 151). Each occasion I took the time to reflect on field notes and observations, I could clearly see how I needed to revise my data collection plan to best meet the needs of my students.

**Graphs and charts.** Since my study relied heavily on student surveys, interviews, and self-assessments, I found the process of creating graphs and charts to be quite useful. It became a visual way for me to display these data in a format that was meaningful for me. Not only were these data meaningful, but I hoped that they could be understood by others as well (Hendricks, 2006). Once the graphs and charts were created in Excel, patterns and trends became much clearer; I found it much easier to isolate students who needed more help with specific
strategies, were disinterested, or those advanced students whom I could invite to serve as mentors for their struggling classmates.

**Coding.** After I had routinely begun writing reflective memos about participant observations and processing raw data into charts and graphs, I found it necessary to code my data (Hendricks, 2006). To do this, I created a series of labels that addressed reoccurring issues in the data I was analyzing. These labels such as “student noted progress,” “teacher noted progress,” or “student frustrations” all specifically related to the idea of comprehension monitoring.

I also coded student work and compared student performance data to their surveys to determine if students were accurately gauging their abilities, overestimating their abilities, or underestimating their abilities. This comparison proved to be exceptionally useful as a springboard for new conversations with students about their progress, or lack thereof, with comprehension monitoring.

**Analytic memos: Educational philosophers.** To begin to look at my field log through different analytic lenses, I relied on the works of Dewey, Freire, and Vygotsky. I read their wisdom about education and educational reform and applied their ideas to my study. I chose specific quotes from each philosopher that were reminiscent of recurring ideas in my study.
As I read Freire, I also shared with my students his ideas and asked them to member check my interpretations. While not all of Freire’s writing was developmentally appropriate for them, my students were able to add their own bit of analysis about the gap in schema, or prior knowledge, among social classes. This additional analysis of their own work and attitudes toward reading added a new rich perspective to my analysis. Of course, it also gave me an opportunity to again code their responses and move closer toward finding important themes in my study.

Methodological Memo. As I entered the final two weeks of my study, I took time to take stock of what I had gathered and analyzed throughout the data collection process. This helped to refocus my ideas and begin to “winnow” my piles of data and re-sort what was most relevant and important to my study (Wolcott, 2009). I did this essential reflection by writing a methodological memo about how far my plan had come, surprises I met along the way, and how I hoped to wrap up my study. I made sure that I re-examined what the original focus and intention of my study was and how I could re-align my data collection plan to answer my research question.
**Post Study Analysis**

Qualitative Action Research does not end when the data collection process is over. After my data collection process had finished, it became time to create thematic statements that would begin to shape my ultimate findings for the study. Two particular types of data analysis helped me to create my theme statements: Figurative Language Analysis and the process of placing codes into the larger thematic units that Ely (1997) calls bins.

**Figurative Language Analysis.** As an English teacher, I naturally enjoy the intricacies of the English language. I enjoy even more how my students use, or misuse, words or phrases in the English language to attempt to convey an idea. While they may be conscious of their usage or not, their choice of figurative language allowed me to uncover feelings and attitudes about reading critically (Saban, 2006). I specifically analyzed lines from their journals, surveys, and class discussions to uncover what they said, what they really meant, and the insight I gained from each comment.

**Bins and Themes.** While coding seemed like a long and complicated process, I was glad I put the time into it when I reached the stage of creating bins as a mean for data analysis. To create my bins, I looked at all of the codes I had been using and attempted to chunk them into different categories. (See Figure 23).
I placed codes together that were related or seemed to reveal similar ideas or understandings. It was at this point that the long, painstaking process of data analysis seemed to pay off.

By placing my codes in bins, I was able to see concepts emerge that related to my study. Hendricks (2006) describes this process as “building general themes from specific examples in the data, thematic analysis” (p. 134). Ultimately, these conceptual ideas became the foundations for the theme statements that sum up what I learned as a result of conducting my study. They revealed a great deal about my students’ successes and struggles, as well as my own.
Figure 23. Bins

CLASS NOVEL:
- Student Engagement
- Analysis
- Evaluation
- Reflection
- Student Enjoyment
- Fix ups
- Metacognition

ARTICLES
- Student Chosen
- Teacher Chosen
- Question Development
- Comment Quality
- Discussion Quality

INDEPENDENT READING
- Appreciation
- Analysis
- Response Length
- Distraction
- Stamina
- Metacognition

My Research Question:
How does explicit training in comprehension monitoring affect reading comprehension for 11th Grade RISE students?

GAFFOLDING:
- Self-Assessment
- Routines
- Teacher Modeling
- Peer Modeling
- Checklists

Frustrations:
- Teacher Indicated
- Student Indicated
- Implicit Struggles
- Absences
- Lazy
- Genre Frustration

PORTFOLIO
- Goal Setting
- Student Noted Improvement
- Teacher Noted Improvement
- Self-Assessment
- Student Noted Success
- Quantitative Success

TEST PREP
- Resources
- Quantitative Success
- Student Noted Improvement
- Teacher Noted Improvement
- Quick Fix

VS
Findings

Introduction

When I devised my question and created my plan for implementation I had no idea how much of an impact this study would have on my own teaching and the learning of my students. Ultimately, I sought to answer my question: What are the observed and reported experiences of students and their teacher when comprehension monitoring is implemented in an eleventh grade Remedial Reading class? I realize now that I answered far more than my question. Instead of just discovering the effects of comprehension monitoring on reading comprehension, I discovered students who were bright, willing to learn, and desperate to achieve. This story became an outlet to share their developments as students: their struggles, their successes, and their journey to appreciate reading. At the same time, it became my rediscovery of how important it is to make time for reading, teach students how to read, and engage them in meaningful learning.

Ample and continuous scaffolding for comprehension monitoring including modeling of strategy use, self-assessment, checklists, and reflection change student reading habits; peer modeling of these same strategies helps to further strengthen the practices of comprehension monitoring.

Even though my students had been previously introduced to reading
comprehension strategies before entering my class, I found that they used them very little during their reading. According to the initial survey, only four of my students stopped to consider if what they were reading made any sense. Most students read on even if they were confused, failing to identify roadblocks. At the end of my study, 17 of my 18 students said that they stopped to consider if what they were reading made sense, and all 17 attempted to use a strategy to overcome a struggle or roadblock during reading in order to comprehend a text. In order to make this significant change in practice, I needed to routinely stress the importance of using comprehension monitoring through regular and prolonged teacher modeling.

I needed to begin by modeling each particular reading strategy for my students. I made the conscious decision to begin with paraphrasing so that my students could begin to find the main idea. I then added more familiar strategies such as connecting and visualizing before spending an extended period of time on combining these strategies with questioning. However, each skill, and the process of combining skills had to be explicitly modeled by me and followed up by extensive practice just as Anday-Porter, Henne, and Horan (2000) discovered. I needed to make the process visual for my students. Even when I was not modeling how to use a strategy on the board or overhead projector, I modeled comprehension monitoring while students read. I always read with them and made annotations, just as I expected them to do, which helped them to feel as if we were
Explicit instruction in the process of test taking (pre-reading questions, using text features, eliminating multiple choice answers) is initially useful to help students feel successful at test taking.

The RISE program was a nine-week course designed to help students, who were identified as basic readers on the PA State Standards for Reading, make progress to pass the PSSA exam. Plain and simple, it was a test prep course, with one goal in mind: proficiency. However, I was determined to accomplish two carefully linked goals: make reading interesting and relevant and prepare students for the PSSA. Initially these two goals seemed to be at odds with each other. As the students frequently noted, the Item Samplers were horrifically boring. They hated the thought of reading those passages, and I often feared that we would never get to a time when they could see the relevance and even enjoyment that could be linked to reading.

However, I knew that the teaching of remediation strategies, combined with a process-approach to reading could initially help my students to feel more successful (Walraven & Reista, 1992; Jacobucci, Richer, Ronan, & Tanis, 2002). At the beginning of the course, students were clearly feeling defeated by test taking, and I needed to change that as quickly as possible. I needed students to feel initial success so that they would be more willing to try new, more difficult
analysis, as the course progressed.

By taking their first Item Sampler set, “Brown Glass Windows” and “Electric Money,” and teaching them how to pre-read the questions and use them to activate short-term memory to set a purpose for reading allowed us to make quick gains. I began to show them that comprehension monitoring begins with learning to set an accurate and useful purpose, which then guides reading (van den Broek, et al., 2001). I modeled, and they practiced pre-reading questions, and together we created our first checklist, which became the building block for the course. Having three items to complete on the list was manageable for students.

In addition, I found it necessary to teach my students specifically how to use particular reading strategies through direct instruction, modeling, and plenty of practice (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). I found I needed to spend a significant amount of time teaching both paraphrasing and questioning. We worked several days with the “Teenage Driving Passage,” as I scaffolded how to add skills until they felt comfortable with making different types of annotations. I knew that they would not use all of them all of the time, but it was important that they had a repertoire of strategies to choose from.

Their check-in surveys after the third week clearly showed that they felt they had made gains in critical reading for the types of skills necessary to be successful on the Samplers: main idea, paraphrasing, using context clues. In our interviews, it also became clear that the students were becoming more confident
about critically reading the item samplers. 14 of my 17 students had made positive
comments that directly related to practicing with the strategies on the item
samplers.

While I don’t believe that my students actually enjoyed the process of
learning how to attack passages, I do think that they found it useful. It was a quick
way to help them feel like they had made significant progress and gave them the
confidence to move on to higher levels of creativity and thinking critically.

Comprehension Monitoring, with self-selected independent reading texts,
helps students to improve their reading stamina by increasing their
awareness of distractions.

At the end of the course, with the exception A Long Way Gone, most
students found their independent reading novels to be their favorite type of
reading, regardless of the genre. However, this was not the case at the beginning
of the course. As I reflect on Jeremy, PJ, and John’s struggles to find a book, I
realize that it took a lot of time for those three boys in particular to enjoy
independent reading. These three boys all began with a reading stamina of less
than four minutes on the first day of class. While John was then able to find a
book early on that he enjoyed during a book talk, the task was not so easy for PJ
and Jeremy. It took two trips to the library with PJ to find him a book that he was
interested in. For Jeremy, it took a trip me a trip to BJ’s to find some non-fiction
Guiness Books to eventually hook him.

However, finding a book for these boys was not simply enough to improve their reading stamina. Jeremy and PJ began as what Kelly and Claussen-Grace (2009) identified as “fake readers” (p. 163). They were only pretending to read. When I added the metacognitive log to track their reading, they were forced to become active readers and monitor their comprehension. In the beginning, each boy spent more time writing down distractions than actually reading. However, because they were allowed to make the decision to stop, they became ready to take ownership of their comprehension (Bauman & Jones, 1993). Once they were fully able to realize common distractions, coupled with discussing how to overcome distractions in class that they began to build their reading stamina. By the end of the nine weeks, all three of the boys were able to read the entire 25 minutes before lunch, even if they had to stop to write down a distraction at some point. The difference was that they were able to jot down quickly whatever it was that was bothering them (generally a thought about something they had to do after school) and then return to reading.

The introduction of the metacognitive log significantly aided my students in the transition from simply “reading” to “reading for understanding.” While the log did not force any students to state what they had learned or to be responsible for the content of the book, it did prompt them to question the author or characters, connect to themes, and predict outcomes. Since they knew they would be writing
a log, they were more forced to think about something to write about as they were reading. As Burke (1994) wrote, “Teachers can use journals as metacognitive strategies by assessing the student plan to monitor” (p. 99), and I was using the log as a means for evaluating their purposeful reading of their independent novel. I assessed their purpose by viewing the quality of their responses.

For my 14 other students who enjoyed their independent reading time from the beginning, simply allowing them the time to read and record their thoughts about reading was incredibly beneficial. As Shimabukuro and Prater (1999) explain, comprehension monitoring improves the overall attention span of reader. The gradual increase of time to read, as well as designated time for consideration of what they read, did improve my students’ thinking about reading and the quality of their metacognitive responses.

**The quality of annotations, discussion and written responses are much more meaningful when articles are of high interest to the students.**

Crabtree et. al. (2010) recommended beginning to teach comprehension monitoring with high interest reading materials. I certainly neglected this crucial bit of information when I chose to begin with the analysis of the pre-test consisting of Item Samplers—Item samplers on which my students did not perform well. While I knew that students would naturally be more willing to engage in active reading if they enjoyed passages, I did not have an exciting
option of passages for the pre-test; they had to be PSSA aligned and approved passages. I knew the danger of beginning to teach comprehension monitoring with these boring passages, but I figured I could make the best of the situation and use them to my advantage to teach students how to take a test.

After students had acquired that skill set, I found much more success teaching comprehension monitoring with passages that the students enjoyed. In particular, the annotations of Kanye West’s and Taylor Swift’s songs, as well as the annotations of *A Long Way Gone*, proved that the students would write much better annotations when they were interested in the reading. Furthermore, as the students became more engaged in *A Long Way Gone*, their annotations became much more meaningful. Initially, they commented on simple literary terms such as setting, plot elements, or characters. As they became more connected to the characters in the story and engaged in the conflict, their annotations gradually became more passionate and evaluative. For example, Izabella’s comments that began as “I never heard that song” and moved to “I don’t think it is fair to force him to be a soldier” to “I wonder if he will ever be able to get over what happened” shows a strong progression of commitment to the novel. Her superficial comment at the beginning shows her attempt at making a connection with the story. Her second comment shows some compassion for the character, while the third shows her fear for him; over time, she had become connected to the character, and so her comments became more involved. Izabella was not
alone in her progression of comments throughout the novel. All students’
comments demonstrated more understanding and higher levels of Bloom’s
Taxonomy as the plot progressed.

Like Fox et. al (2005), Booth (2002), and Frederick (2006), I found that
students needed to plan less for monitoring when they enjoyed what they were
reading. It was clear that students required much more planning and forced
annotations when articles were not of interest to them. This was often the case
with the Item Samplers, excluding “Teenage Driving.” On non-fiction articles that
students enjoyed, most comments focused on evaluative questions and
connection. Janice, Izabella, Keri, and Jim all commented that it was easier for
them to write questions about topics that they cared about. On Item Samplers such
as “Six Months on Mir,” that were less favored, student annotations appeared to
be more at the knowledge level, recalling important facts. Furthermore, Dominic,
PJ, and Destiny all commented during the final whole class interview that they
needed to write annotations to stay focused during that particular passage because
it wasn’t interesting to them.

The direct connection between student level of interest in the passage and
the quality of annotations prompted me, throughout the study, to attempt to find
many different kinds of articles that students liked in order to build their
background knowledge. I realized that they would most likely appreciate more
topics if they had a stronger base of knowledge. We began with articles about
teenagers in America, introduced teenagers from other countries, and eventually explored the oppression plaguing many societies. As I expected, I found that as their background knowledge expanded that they were more willing to read, and enjoy, new topics as well; they were engrossed in our discussions about the “blood diamonds” and the new crisis surrounding smart chips for cell phones.

It is clear that students will have more to write, express, illustrate and discuss when they can find value, or at least a connection to the topic of reading. When an explicit connection cannot be found, it is still important for students to use annotations to stay engaged in the article.

Continuous comprehension monitoring throughout the course of a novel provides excellent opportunities for analysis, discussion, and evaluation, which prompts high levels of engagement among students.

Barnett (1998) wrote that the students who used the strategies most effectively would end up with the greatest understanding. I found the same to be true in my study. As comprehension monitoring became more of a routine for students and they began self-selecting strategies to help them understand, their capabilities of analysis greatly improved. My students such as Destiny, Janice, and Keri who had become very good at annotating, ultimately created the best slideshows that demonstrated their deep understanding of *A Long Way Gone* and its connection to the non-fiction articles about war. Since the project was ongoing,
these young women realized that they would need to focus on paraphrasing and clarifying major events. Their clear annotations in the book and on the articles served as an excellent reminder of the important events; thus, they were able to review their notes to find clear comparisons. These clear comparisons then led to excellent slides.

Students who were still not effectively choosing strategies for remembering information over an extended period of time struggled much more with drawing clear comparisons between the non-fiction articles and the memoir. Jeremy’s choice only to record his thoughts about the character’s actions proved to be useless when trying to compare to the non-fiction articles that lacked emotion. Instead, he had to spend a lot of time rereading sections of the books and paraphrasing. However, as he realized his mistakes and became more clear with his annotations as the book progressed, he became much more successful at selecting strategies to use. Similarly, both Jeremy and Dominic began with superficial comments and found it difficult to recall important events; their realization also led to better annotations. Like Jaccobucci, Richert, Ronan, and Tanis (2002) concluded, students were more likely to improve their reading comprehension when they were give ample time to internalize and practice with the strategies over an extended period of time. Working with comprehension monitoring of the novel for three weeks provided an excellent learning experience for these young men, as they began to determine when specific strategies were
beneficial for various purposes.

For students like Jim, Danny, and Frank, who were particularly quiet in class, comprehension monitoring helped them to participate more in whole-class discussions. Each student became particularly skilled at determining which skill was necessary for creating meaning while reading. Jitendra, Hoppes and Xin (2000) found that comprehension monitoring led to positive attitudes and confidence about reading. When I asked students to discuss roadblocks, each knew to annotate particularly difficult passages and ask clarifying questions. When I asked students to prepare for discussion questions, they were able to use their questions as a guide for setting a purpose and annotate accordingly. Their ability to do so helped them to be thoroughly prepared for class discussions; the fact that they could reference their annotations gave them confidence to discuss.

The creation of a comprehension portfolio allows students to establish individual comprehension goals, evaluate goals based on the evidence provided, and reflect upon their growth as a reader over a period of time.

The creation of the comprehension portfolio was the most useful teaching and learning tool I implemented in my study. The comprehension portfolio accomplished many things: it provided a place to record and follow goals, it served as a confidence booster, it celebrated strengths and revealed weaknesses, and sparked meaningful dialogue between my students and me.
Arkebauer, MacDonald and Palmer (2002), as well as Campbell et. al (1998) identified the need for short term and long term goals for comprehension monitoring. I found that my students needed these goals to remain focused throughout the course. The attainable and measurable short term goals helped students to feel successful as they broke the complex process of comprehension monitoring into manageable chunks. With the first short term goal, 14 of my 17 students selected one facet of comprehension monitoring to focus on. Danny, Lenny, and Frank all needed to begin by learning to figure out where they got stuck instead of just reading to the end of the article; they were not ready for strategy selection or implementation quite yet. On the other hand, Keri, Nancy, and Destiny already knew when they met a “roadblock,” so they wanted to practice a particular strategy to help them overcome it. Whether students needed to start at the very beginning of comprehension monitoring by identifying roadblocks, or were able to begin trying to implement strategies to overcome those barriers, they were all able to set and then attain their goals by the end of the quarter.

The long term goal setting helped to remind students how their short term goals fit into the larger process of independent comprehension monitoring. The long term goals that the students set in the first week of class were all met much sooner than the students had expected. Keri, whose long-term goal was to be able to find the main idea, was able to accomplish this before the end of the first
quarter, as she was clearly able to identify the main idea of the Kanye Articles when other students had difficulty. She then was able to modify her long term goal to effectively choosing strategies for different purposes in her mid-semester reflection.

Furthermore, using the portfolio as evidence for the mid-semester reflection, end of semester reflection, as well as other reflective journals, provided opportunities to assess their respective strengths and weaknesses as a comprehender. As Fogarty (1994) wrote, “If students are to take on a posture of life-long learning, they must become acutely aware of their own strengths and weaknesses (p. 63). Often times when students were feeling unsuccessful I directed them back to their portfolios to see how far they had really come. It served as a source of inspiration for students such as John and PJ who lacked serious confidence at the beginning of the semester. In addition, having the portfolio as evidence of strengths and weaknesses provided a starting point for my students like Jim who despised writing. He was able to use previous comments and things he had already written to develop arguments to use in his mid-semester reflection.

Arkebauer, MacDonald and Palmer (2002) discovered that students felt more confident about their reading abilities after taking surveys. The surveys in the portfolio also helped to improve the attitudes of my students about their own comprehension skills. The initial surveys clearly showed the stress they associated
with reading comprehension, while the final surveys showed that some of that stress was alleviated. I found that the surveys were useful to distribute when students were beginning to feel overwhelmed or unsuccessful. Again, the surveys became a vehicle for showing students how much they had accomplished between surveys.

**Frustrations with comprehension are directly connected to the genre and purpose for the reading.**

Throughout the course, I found the students’ largest sense of frustration came with how to approach various passages. When students got used to working with a specific genre, they had difficulty transferring comprehension monitoring skills when we switched to another genre. For example, we began with what I like to call “test genre” articles, which were both non-fiction and fiction articles accompanied by questions at the end of each section. I taught the students how to use the questions to establish a purpose for reading. However, when I introduced a non-fiction article without questions, students had a difficult time setting a purpose. For example, Izabella voiced her frustration with setting a purpose with the “Growing Up Saudi” article. She did not know how to create a purpose without using the guided questions. She forgot to use the other text features we had explored with the “test” articles to help her determine a purpose for reading. This skill set did not immediately transfer, and so she struggled. Similarly, when
we switched from primarily non-fiction current event articles from *Upfront Magazine* to the novel, *A Long Way Gone*, students struggled with adjusting to monitoring their comprehension for a lengthy work. There were many new roadblocks with a longer chapter book than with short articles, so it took some time to identify and work through those roadblocks. Wolfe and Goldman (2005) noted that it was possible for students to learn to transfer comprehension monitoring among text genres but it required careful planning and scaffolding. This was certainly true for my study, as I had to spend the first few days with *A Long Way Gone* teaching students how to annotate for important plot elements, such as new characters, setting, mood, and tone. However, after several days and practice with how to annotate a longer work so they could remember important events, annotations became clear, concise, and useful. The quicker students were able to transfer their comprehension monitoring skills, the sooner they became more successful at monitoring their understanding.
Next Steps

When I reflect on all the hard work that my students and I did over the course of my nine-week study and afterwards, I have found that the hardest part to deal with has been the elimination of the RISE course for future years due to budget cuts. The absence of this course, a quality intervention built into the school day, will certainly impact at-risk students like Jeremy, Keri, Destiny, and John, who simply needed the extra support. It will affect those students like Nancy and Jim who are unable to stay after school because they are partially responsible for providing the income that helps to shelter their families. When I look back upon their success and their new outlook on reading, I am saddened to think that the many other students in their same position may not be afforded the supports to become confident, capable readers before leaving high school.

I certainly know that my students are not “perfect readers” after my nine week course, but the improvements I saw in them, and more importantly, the improvements they saw within themselves. If nothing else, this course was a well-needed, and deserved, confidence boost for students who saw themselves as poor readers. Even though our course ended after nine weeks, I have regularly kept in touch with each of them through member checks. I have tried my hardest to voice the need to be monitoring comprehension in all classes, while encouraging them to be confident, learners who read “smarter not harder.”
Additionally, I had several of my RISE students for PSSA testing in March. It was rewarding to walk around the room during this high-stakes test and watch them monitor their own comprehension. I have already arranged with their grade level principal to meet with my students and discuss their PSSA results when they are received this summer. While I am optimistic that they will show improvement, I am also realistic that they may not all yet be proficient. In the event that anyone is not proficient, I am hoping that each student will be willing to let me help him/her devise a plan to show his or her proficiency before graduation. We already have an entire portfolio of data established and that can certainly be added to in the coming year.

Since the course has been eliminated, I will need to find other places to infuse my teaching with comprehension monitoring. I now strongly believe that comprehension monitoring is extremely valuable for all students, and I do see opportunities to teach pieces of it in my other English classes.

Currently, I have the privilege of teaching critical literacy nine, which is a full year English class. Since I have these students for an entire year, I can begin to teach them the foundations for comprehension monitoring: the strategies. I currently explicitly teach summarizing, visualizing, and predicting in that course, but this study has prompted me to want to teach the strategies that help the students to connect to the text such as questioning and evaluating. In order to do
so, I plan to follow the same process that I used in this study: teacher modeling, guided practice, and then finally independent practice.

In addition to teaching ninth grade critical literacy, I also teach tenth grade academic students. In these classes, I explicitly teach my students active reading strategies. However, in my teaching, I feel like I have been missing the crucial element of comprehension monitoring: knowing when and why to use which strategy. In the future I plan to spend less time refreshing their memory of strategies and more time teaching them how to select strategies. In order to do this I will use the “During Reading Checklist” that my RISE students found to be useful. Furthermore, I have had the desk reminder checklists laminated and will use them in future years to help students remember how to actively engage in reading.

I also feel that goal setting could easily be implemented in any of my classes. The goals that my RISE students set helped them to stay focused and not become overwhelmed. Instead of looking at comprehension monitoring as a complex process, they gradually worked on pieces of it. By feeling successful with these small pieces, they gradually took on more responsibility for their own learning while reading. The focus shifted from me telling them what to remember while reading to them making decisions about what was important. This shift in practice would be helpful for all of my students. I can especially envision goal setting for reading comprehension success to be beneficial for my critical literacy
students, who frequently depend on me to make meaning for them. I believe that helping them to achieve attainable comprehension goals will help them to become more invested in their own learning.

The other piece of comprehension monitoring that I will weave into my future courses is independent reading. With so much pressure to teach a large curriculum, I had lost sight of how important it is to simply give students time to read. While my academic students do read books independently for the course, I rarely give them enough time to read in class and enjoy reading. By allowing them to read in class and complete metacognitive journals, I hope that they will be find a genre of literature that they appreciate and will inspire them to read more on their own, long after they leave my classroom.

While I will not be conducting a formal action research study next year, I do know that with new students comes a new set of challenges and struggles that ultimately will lead to new questions. I still plan to informally collect data and analyze it to inform my teaching practices and attempt to answer questions that arise along the way.

As I continue to educate my students how to monitor their own comprehension, it is important that I continue to further my own education in the field of literacy. My study has helped me to see the great necessity for the incorporation of comprehension monitoring among all students. I am quite interested in the foundations of reading and would consider working towards a
Reading Specialist Certificate. This would allow me to help students of all ages overcome reading struggles, and simultaneously learn to enjoy the practice of reading. I believe strongly that all children possess the desire to read but many become disinterested when they struggle. Furthermore, I now believe so strongly in comprehension monitoring that I would like to share with others what I have learned. I want others to see the relevance of teaching students how to read in various content areas and would consider pursuing a Supervisory Certificate for Curriculum and Instruction. While I am not sure what future career path I will choose, I do know that conducting this action research study has affirmed my passion for literacy, reading, and teaching.
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Appendix A
Interview Questions

Interview #1:
1. How would you define comprehension monitoring?
2. What do you feel your strengths are as a reader?
3. What do you feel your weaknesses are as a reader?
4. What did you do while reading the passages on your SRI?
5. What should you do while reading any passage?
6. What do you notice about your scores?
7. What goals would you like to set based on your scores?
8. What do you hope to accomplish by the end of this course?
9. How do you think you can start to work on some of these goals?

Interview #2:
1. How have you been doing with the target reading passages?
2. What have you learned about yourself as a reader?
3. What do you notice about your comprehension while you are reading now?
4. What strategies seem to be working for you?
5. How have you managed the use of checklists in this class?
6. How have you tried to use the checklists in other classes?
7. How have you been able to achieve any goals?
8. What goals do we need to revisit? (plan creation)
9. How can I help you achieve your goals?

Interview #3: Course Exit Interview
1. How have you grown as a learner this semester?
2. Which self-monitoring strategies do you find most useful? Why?
3. Which self-monitoring strategies do you find least useful? Why?
4. How do you plan to use what you have learned in future courses?
5. What are your goals for Academic English in the Spring?
6. How do you plan to achieve these goals?
7. How will you communicate your academic needs to your teachers next semester?
Appendix B

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL PROMPTS

Reflective Journal #1: Discuss your current self-monitoring practices. Consider the items below:

1. How do you ensure you comprehend the text?
2. What strategies do you use to focus?
3. What strategies do you use to make meaning?
4. What do you do when you get stuck?

Reflective Journal #2: What were the results of your first PSSA Item Sampler? What types of questions did you struggle with most? What can you do to address these comprehension issues? Set 2 goals for yourself.

Reflective Journal #3: How might you use the during reading checklist introduced in class to reach any of your goals you have set? Explain your action plan.

Reflective Journal #4: How have you reached your goals so far? The mid-quarter is approaching, what do you need to focus on?

Reflective Journal #5: What were the results of your PSSA Item Sampler? What types of questions did you struggle with most? What improvements did you make? What do you need to work on before the end of this course in self-directed learning time?

Reflective Journal #6: How have your comprehension monitoring practices changed now that we are reading a longer work. What do you struggle with in the memoir?

Reflective Journal #7: How have the video clips from Sierra Leone changed your visualizations of A Long Way Gone? How do you now read differently?

Reflective Journal #8: Reflect on your progress throughout this 9 week course. Use your notebook, journal, item samples, and checklists as a means for discussing your successes. Be sure to reflect on how you will use self-monitoring strategies as you exit into Academic English.
Dear Parents,

I am currently taking courses at Moravian College toward a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The program at Moravian assists practicing teachers in implementing the most effective teaching strategies to maximize the learning experiences for their students. A major requirement of the program calls for me to implement a systematic study of my own teaching practice. I am writing to ask your permission to use data that I collect from your child during this process. The study will take place from August 30, 2010 to November 3, 2010.

The focus of my study is on the implementation of self-monitoring strategies in the RISE classroom. The goal of my study is to help students become more aware of their metacognitive thinking processes and make them active readers. In order to accomplish this, we will be using a series of checklists, concept charts, and reflective journals to help students become consciously aware of their comprehension throughout the entire reading process. It is my hope that giving students ownership in the learning process will increase their motivation and engagement, not only in reading class, but also across subject areas. Through the use of student work, observations, student interviews and student surveys, I will collect data and draw conclusions about my inquiry question. I hope to help all my students achieve success, maximize confidence, and cultivate motivation to discover how to make learning as meaningful as possible.

Your child’s participation in the study is completely voluntary, and he or she may withdraw at any time without penalty by informing the teacher in writing that he/she no longer wishes to participate in the study. Regardless of participation, all students will receive the same instruction in the classroom. If your child does choose to be part of the study, all data I collect will be kept in strictest confidence. Your child’s name will never be used, the data will be kept in a secure location, and at the end of the study, all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions for me throughout this process, please do not hesitate to email me, Sara Fiske at , call at , or contact my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-625-1482. Finally, you can contact the school principal, , if you have any further questions. Thank you so much for your support. I look forward to helping your students strengthen their metacognitive processes (the processes by which they actively engage in reading) by monitoring their own comprehension.

Respectfully,

Sara Fiske
☐ I give my permission for my child’s data to be used in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form and that my student may withdraw as a participant at any time during the study.

_________________________  ___________________________
Student Name                          Parent/Guardian Signature

_________________________
Date
April 13, 2010

Dear Principal,

I am currently taking courses at Moravian College toward a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The program at Moravian assists practicing teachers in implementing the most effective teaching strategies to maximize the learning experiences for their students. A major requirement of the program calls for me to implement a systematic study of my own teaching practice. I am writing to ask your approval for my study.

The focus of my study is on the implementation of self-monitoring strategies in the RISE classroom. The goal of my study is to help students become more aware of their metacognitive thinking processes and make them active readers. In order to accomplish this, we will be using a series of checklists, concept charts, and reflective journals to help students become consciously aware of their comprehension throughout the entire reading process. It is my hope that giving students ownership in the learning process will increase their motivation and engagement, not only in reading class, but also across subject areas. Through the use of student work, observations, student interviews and student surveys, I will collect data and draw conclusions about my inquiry question. I hope to help all my students achieve success, maximize confidence, and cultivate motivation to discover how to make learning as meaningful as possible.

Each student’s participation in the study is completely voluntary, and he/she will not be penalized if he/she chooses not to participate. Regardless of participation, all students will receive the same instruction in the classroom. If a student chooses to be part of the study, all of the students’ names will be kept confidential as well as the names of teachers, other staff, and the school. If used, student work samples will be altered to ensure confidentiality. After the study, all data will be destroyed. Upon receiving your approval, I will be sending consent forms home to all students to attain parent approval, but any student has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. A copy of the consent form for parents is attached.

If you should have any questions for me about my project, please don’t hesitate to ask or email me. Additionally, you may forward any additional questions to my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, at 610-625-1482 or jshosh@moravian.edu Signing the back portion of this letter indicates that you approve my study. Thank you so much for your support.
Respectfully,

Sara Fiske

PRINCIPAL’S CONSENT FORM

By signing this letter, I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, that I have read and understand the consent form, and that I have received a copy. Sara Fiske has my permission to conduct this study.

Principal’s signature:______________________________
Appendix D
Survey #1

Self-Monitoring Survey #1
Where am I starting?

DIRECTIONS: Answer each question HONESTLY! This is just a pre-assessment to see what you naturally do to monitor your own comprehension while you are reading.

1. Read through the following list and put a check mark next to the strategies you regularly use to read a difficult book or piece of writing.

When I am I reading…

- I periodically stop and ask, "Does this make sense?"
- I express the difference between my own knowledge and beliefs and ideas expressed in text.
- I express awareness or lack of awareness of what the content means.
- I express doubt about understanding when I am unsure or when meaning is unclear.
- I ask "Where did I lose track?"
- I identify the place where I began to lose comprehension.
- I use stem-starters to stay focused.
- I reread.
- I read on and try to clear up the confusion.
- I substitute words I know (and that fit the context) to replace words I don't understand to see if that works.
- I make mind pictures to "see" in my head what the text means.
- I connect what I am reading to what I have read previously in this text, and what I have read and knew before I read this text. I may ask an author-and-me question because my personal knowledge may help me figure out the meaning.
- I ask myself questions (Why did the character do this? Why did the author put this in? How is this important? Am I supposed to "think and search" or infer?).
- I use these other strategies: [WOL]
- I ask for help if I have made attempts to understand but can't get it. I ask a peer and then I ask my teacher or another adult. AKA, “Ask three before me!”

2. What comprehension strategies have you used in previous classes?

3. What would you consider your comprehension strengths and weaknesses? Rank them 1-5, with one being the weakest and 5 being the strongest.

Finding the Main Idea  Identifying the Author’s Purpose
Inferencing  Retelling
Determining the Meaning of Vocabulary

4. During this course, I really would like to get better at…
5. As the teacher, you can help me achieve my goals by…

6. In an effort to improve my comprehension, I plan to…
Appendix E
High Interest Books Used For Book Talk


Where to find more great books:

Young Adult Library Services Association book lists

http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklistsawards/quickpicks/qp2010.cfm
Appendix F
Good Reader’s Strategy List
As developed by RISE students

Highlight (but not too much!)

Talk to the Text (Annotating!)
  Predict
  Clarify
  Visualize
  Connect
    Text to World
    Text to Self
    Text to Text
  Paraphrase
  Summarize
  Question (Q.A.R.)

Use text features (headings)

Look at Charts, Graphs, Pictures

Double Entry Journal (this is what I read…so this is what I know…)

Reading Logs (metacognitive)
  Reread

Chunk information

Use context clues

Use References:
  Use a dictionary
  Ask a peer
  Ask a teacher

Find the Main Idea

Make educated guesses based on evidence (inferences)
Appendix G

During Reading Checklist

Activate your metacognitive practices and be an active reader! Use the checklist below to monitor your comprehension WHILE you are reading. Check off the strategies that you use.

- Preview the questions to focus my reading
- Set a purpose for reading
- Read the text boxes, title and footnotes
- Paraphrase each chunk
- Question in the margin with QAR
- Use stem starters to annotate
- Substitute Vocabulary Words
- Figure out where comprehension breaks down
- Use the graphs or illustrations to clarify
- Connect to prior learning
- Make predictions
- Use the text features
- Analyze sentence structure

Follow Up: Use your text annotations and checklist to check your comprehension

Summarize the text in 25 words or less:

I think the main idea is:

One essential question this relates to is:

The author’s purpose was
Appendix H

Survey #2: RISE REFLECTION

Hello superstar! It’s your time to shine. Reflect on your hard work by responding to the prompts below 😊

My favorite thing I have read so far in this course is...
I liked it because…

When I started this course, I felt …about my comprehension monitoring skills.

Now I feel…about my comprehension monitoring skills.

I feel like my reading stamina has improved since we started independent reading

Yes    No

I feel like I understand more when I read (circle one)

My independent book    News Articles    PSSA Item Samplers
Documentaries

Because…

One thing I feel like I have gotten better at this week is…

The thing that is really helping me to be a better reader is…

One thing I still need to work on is…

I am worried about… (a school related issue, please 😊)

For me, reading is like…
Appendix I
Self-Monitoring Survey #3
How far have I come?

DIRECTIONS: Answer each question HONESTLY! This is a check-in to see how much more “metacognitive” you have become.

1. Read through the following list and put a check mark next to the strategies you regularly use to read a difficult book or piece of writing.

When I am reading…

- I periodically stop and ask, "Does this make sense?"
- I express the difference between my own knowledge and beliefs and ideas expressed in text.
- I express awareness or lack of awareness of what the content means.
- I express doubt about understanding when I am unsure or when meaning is unclear.
- I ask "Where did I lose track?"
- I identify the place where I began to lose comprehension.
- I use stem-starters to stay focused.
- I reread.
- I read on and try to clarify the confusion.
- I substitute words I know (and that fit the context) to replace words I don't understand to see if that works.
- I make mind pictures to "see" in my head what the text means.
- I connect what I am reading to what I have read previously in this text, and what I have read and knew before I read this text. I may ask an author-and-me question because my personal knowledge may help me figure out the meaning.
- I ask myself questions (Why did the character do this? Why did the author put this in? How is this important? Am I supposed to “think and search” or infer?).
- I use the checklists provided to me in class
- I write reflectively about what I have learned
- I ask for help if I have made attempts to understand but can't get it. I ask a peer and then I ask my teacher or another adult. AKA, “Ask three before me!”
- I read the questions at the end to focus my reading

2. What new comprehension monitoring strategies did you check off? How are you using them?

3. How do you feel your comprehension has improved after using “after reading” checklists?
4. How do you feel your comprehension has improved by writing reflectively about passages?

5. How do you think making your own checklists has improved your reading comprehension?

6. REASSES: What would you consider your comprehension strengths and weaknesses? Rank them 1-5, with one being the weakest and 5 being the strongest.
   - Finding the Main Idea
   - Identifying the Author’s Purpose
   - Inferencing
   - Retelling
   - Determining the Meaning of Vocabulary

7. Since the beginning of this course, I think I have gotten better at…

8. I have been working really hard on…

9. The things that have helped me most so far are…

10. Some goals I need to set for Academic English next semester are…

11. In our exit interview, I need to discuss…

12. I think this course would be more effective if…

13. Some things that were effective in this course were…

14. My journey through RISE has been… (write a simile)