

Reading Comprehension and Higher Order Thinking Skills

When children first learn to read, much of their effort is focused on decoding and pronouncing each word correctly. While this kind of phonetic interpretation is essential, in order to become proficient readers students have to be able to understand the meaning of what they read. This not only requires comprehension skills but ultimately good thinking skills.

As students grow into mature readers, their comprehension and thinking skills should also mature. Reading comprehension involves the ability to not only read the lines but also the abstract step of “reading between the lines.” However, the next crucial step involves higher order thinking that takes reading between the lines one step farther. “Good readers” have the ability to read beyond the lines. Higher-order thinking skills enable students to do this and find the real value in the information they are reading.

Students with poor reading comprehension skills lack adequate ability to truly understand the many facets of what they are reading. Processing the information presented in the text is hard for them. They also find it difficult to connect new ideas to previously learned facts and they haven’t learned to implement higher order thinking skills so they can analyze, synthesize, and evaluate new knowledge.

What are higher order thinking skills?

In the 1950s, Benjamin Bloom, an educational psychologist, and his colleagues developed a classification system identifying different levels of cognition that defined both lower and high order thinking. The six levels within the cognitive domain are from lower to higher: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Higher-order thinking is the ability to think beyond rote memorization of facts or knowledge. Rote memory recall is not really thinking. Higher order thinking skills involve actually doing something with the facts that we learn. When students use their higher order thinking skills that means they understand, they can find connections between many facts, they can manipulate them, and put them together in new ways. Most importantly they can apply them to find new solutions to problems.

Students with poor reading comprehension skills may be able to answer concrete questions or recall details. They can usually name characters or places. But they may have a difficult time summarizing information, or comparing one story to another, or using new information to reach new conclusions. Making inferences, identifying the big picture or moral of a story, distinguishing opinions from facts, or finding biases are also skills very difficult – if not impossible – for the reader with poor reading comprehension skills.

One of the goals of reading is to make new connections to our life and world. Readers who can use higher order thinking not only show knowledge and understanding of the text, they can put the information in new contexts and form relations between ideas.

How to strengthen higher order thinking skills for better reading comprehension

Parents can help their students develop higher order thinking skills with a little sit-down time with their child. Review reading material together and ask questions that help make connections and see analogies. Rather than simply asking, "What was the story about?" also ask "How was this story like another you have read?" Encourage the reader to identify problems or dilemmas so they see themselves as problem solvers.

Ask how a situation in the story or text could affect other characters. This will help students develop empathy and understand different viewpoints as well as consequences.

Help students think beyond the story by asking what could have been done differently for a better outcome. This invites creative thinking and problem solving – skills essential in a competitive market place.

Good reading comprehension skills do more than allow students to make sense of what they read. By using higher order thinking skills they can use new information to make help make sense of their world through analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

RESOURCE:

<http://www.k12reader.com/reading-comprehension-and-higher-order-thinking-skills/>