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**Situating Strategies: An Examination of Comprehension Strategy Instruction in One Upper Elementary Classroom Oriented Toward Culturally Relevant Teaching**

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*Abstract: Drawing on ethnographic and discourse analytic methods, this article examines how comprehension strategies aligned with goals in a classroom oriented toward culturally relevant teaching. Findings indicate that (a) two distinct sets of comprehension were taught in the room and (b) one set aligned more easily with culturally relevant teaching than the other.*

Comprehension (or cognitive) strategy instruction has considerable literacy research supporting it as an instructional practice (e.g., Baker, 2008; Dole, Nokes, & Drets, 2008; Duffy, 1993; Harris & Pressley, 1991; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Pearson, 2008; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, & Brown, 1992). Additionally, it has become more common in elementary classrooms, in part, because of the popularity of professional advisement books on the topic (e.g., Allington, 2006; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene, 2006; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997/2007; Miller, 2002; Tovani, 2004). This focus on teaching cognitive strategies also occupies center stage in curriculum materials. Textbook authors and publishers have responded to calls for more comprehension strategy instruction by including the strategies in current editions (Brown, Block, Paris, Pearson, Dewitz, & Campanaro, 2007).

Culturally relevant teaching has also been supported by extensive research (Gutstein, Lipman, Hernandez, & de los Reyes, 1997; Howard, 2001, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995, 1998; Lynn, 2006; Matthews, 2003). And, like comprehension strategy instruction, it too has

immediate practical possibility. Both culturally relevant teaching and strategic comprehension instruction have been cited as "hav[ing] the potential to challenge students academically and intellectually while treating them with dignity and respect" when implemented by sociopolitically aware teachers (Bartolomé, 1994, p. 177). My intention in this study was to document the two approaches as they worked together in a situated context. This article reports on the following questions of inquiry: What does comprehension strategy instruction look like in the classroom of a teacher oriented towards culturally relevant teaching? Specifically, how do comprehension strategy instruction and culturally relevant teaching interact within one classroom setting, particularly within the context of teacher interactive read-alouds?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This article draws on theories of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and strategic instruction (Jones, Palinscar, Ogle, & Carr, 1987). Both provide opportunities for academic rigor and a student-centered curriculum when implemented by a critical teacher (Bartolomé, 1994).

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Building on Shulman's (1987) "wisdom of practice" and working from a critical race theory perspective, Ladson-Billings (1995) identified specific pedagogical characteristics to effectively teach students while honoring them and building on community knowledge. She did this work, in part, by focusing on teachers' conceptions of others, conceptions of themselves, how they structured classroom social relations, and their conceptions of knowledge. That is, the teacher should work towards high academic expectations while understanding that both she and her students come from particular histories and ways of interacting with the world that change over time. This fluidity also applies to knowledge and how it is constructed and re-constructed. In other words, knowledge

claims occur within larger stories that work within specific groups of people.

From a culturally relevant teaching point of view, teaching should "meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). All teaching, however, is fluid. It seems unlikely that every action of any teacher could be categorized as culturally relevant. Throughout this article, therefore, this particular pedagogical approach is regarded as a goal, with attention paid to how one teacher acts toward that goal.

### **Comprehension Strategy Instruction**

In this study, comprehension strategy instruction is defined as including the following teacher actions: engagement in explicit or explanatory talk at the cognitive level, modeling of the strategies using a shared text, monitoring of students' individual strategy use, and pedagogically working toward developing strategic readers. Comprehension strategy instruction works from a constructivist perspective (Duffy, 1993; Harris & Pressley, 1991; Pressley et al., 1992). As a result, strategies are a means to an end, not the goal, of reading. The goal is meaning making. Strategies are most effective when used flexibly (as needed) by the reader. A reader uses more than one strategy at a time and knows when to switch. By focusing on strategies, the meaning of text is left open to interpretation; thus allowing for social meaning making. But whether or not this opportunity is taken advantage of depends on the teacher. Handsfield and Jiménez (2008) argue that comprehension strategy instruction often works without taking the cultural component into account. A focus on individual thinking can limit both "how students access prior knowledge and experiences" (p. 452) and "the kinds of prior knowledge that are deemed acceptable in school" (p. 452), especially when it comes to culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

This article presents a thread of a qualitative study that centered around the nature of textually related discourse in a third grade classroom oriented toward culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). More specifically, this report examines the impact of comprehension strategy instruction in the classroom of one teacher who worked toward teaching reading (often through teacher read-alouds) according to the principles of culturally relevant teaching.

### **Methods**

This qualitative research study drew heavily on ethnographic methods. The classroom that participated in the research project was selected for multiple purposes, most related to the European-American teacher, Gail Harris (pseudonyms used throughout), who was selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 1980) for her orientation toward culturally relevant teaching, her reputation across contexts (local school, district level, university, community) for high-quality teaching in a school in which classroom teachers were under considerable external constraints (i.e., focus on state test scores, steadily increasing prescription and monitoring for teachers), and the multiple goals she had for her students as readers.

Gail's school was located in the middle of a working class neighborhood in which most residents identified as Latina/o. A large percentage of residents also identified as African American, with a very small percentage identifying as European American. The demographics of Gail's classroom, on the whole, reflected those of the neighborhood (with a somewhat smaller Latina/o population because of Spanish/English bilingual classrooms in the grade-level).

### **Comprehension Strategies within the Classroom Context**

Two different sets of comprehension strategies were taught in this classroom. The first came from the professional books that Gail planned from (i.e., Harvey & Goodvis, 2000; Keene &

Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002). These books were written for a practitioner audience and tended to draw on research studies published in the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Duffy & Roehler, 1987). These books centered around the following strategies: making connections, questioning, visualizing and inferring, determining importance, and synthesizing. The sort of instruction advocated by these books was designed to help readers monitor their own understanding of the text and develop metacognitive awareness. Gail implemented these strategies in her classroom across the two years of data collection.

A second set of comprehension strategies came from the state reading standards. The state standard that related most closely to reading comprehension stated, "The student uses a variety of strategies to comprehend selections read aloud and selections read independently" ([http://www.lea.statc.tx.us/teks/grade/Third\\_Grade.pdO](http://www.lea.statc.tx.us/teks/grade/Third_Grade.pdO)). The language of this first part of the standard could align easily with the professional development books Gail read (see the Appendix for the complete standard.) These comprehension strategies seem to originate from Davis' (1944) nine potential component skills of comprehension: word meanings, word meanings in context, follow passage organization, main thought, answer specific text-based questions, text-based questions with paraphrase, draw inferences about content, literary devices, author's purpose (as cited in Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Although this second set of comprehension strategies comes from research that identifies them as skills, I will continue to refer to them as strategies throughout this article for two reasons. First, they were called comprehension strategies in the local context. Second,

[i]t is important that the terms *skill* and *strategy* be used to distinguish automatic processes from deliberately controlled processes. At the heart of accomplished reading is a balance of both—automatic application and use of reading skills, and intentional, effortful employment of reading strategies-accompanied by the ability to shift seamlessly between the two when the situation calls for it. (Afflerbach et al., 2008, p. 371)

So, following Afflerbach et al., skills describe more habitual capabilities that a student can do without stopping to think. Strategies are more intentional. Strategies develop into skills over time, with practice. I also acknowledge that many reading researchers would not consider that second set of strategies to fall under the comprehension strategy instruction umbrella. This would most likely be even more true if the term used were cognitive strategy instruction. Within this particular local context, however, the two sets of strategies had reached a common descriptive label in many cases.

Any attempt to distinguish which set of strategies provided for better reading instruction would be beyond the purposes of this article. Instead, I worked from the understanding that both could offer potential for quality reading instruction. For this article, I investigated both sets of comprehension strategies as they related to the core components of culturally relevant teaching.

### **Data Collection**

I regularly attended these classrooms as a participant observer (Spradley, 1980) for two consecutive school years (October to May). On average, I went twice per week with the visits typically lasting between one and three hours. My observation focused on classroom interactions as they related to literacy and culturally relevant teaching, with a particular focus on the teacher and teaching.

Ethnographic and constant comparative (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) data collection methods were used in the study of this classroom that had the same teacher but different students in the two years (third/fourth grade during year one; third grade during year two). Data collection included expanded fieldnotes (usually within 24 hours), audio and videorecordings, teacher interviews, student interviews, student teacher interviews, and artifacts of student work (including photocopies of students' reader response journals and photographs of wall charts that class members created together) and teacher planning resources.

### **Data Analysis**

Constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) took place during and following data collection. During the first year of data collection, it became clear that understandings of comprehension strategy instruction in this classroom were more complex than those often outlined in research literature. This understanding affected data collection, particularly which student artifacts were collected, how student interviews were conducted, and the topics for the last two teacher interviews.

Across the two years, developing hypotheses related to comprehension strategy instruction and their relationship to culturally relevant teaching were further developed and refined through reading and re-reading expanded fieldnotes. As the focus of this study became more defined, I went back through all expanded fieldnotes and teacher interviews, this time attending only to how students responded to classroom texts and classroom interactions that related to comprehension strategy instruction. Because teacher interactive read-alouds were such an important part of how the comprehension strategy lessons were taught, I then focused in on teacher read-alouds. These read-alouds (total #24) provided an opportunity to investigate the construction of literary understanding as classroom participants responded to text (Sipe, 2000). During data collection and analysis I implemented prolonged engagement (i.e., I was in the classroom regularly for two consecutive school years), negative case analysis (i.e., I carefully examined teaching examples that were not culturally relevant), and member checking (i.e., I have checked my understandings of the findings with Gail) for purposes of trustworthiness.

## **Findings**

I have organized this section according to the research questions. First, I describe how comprehension strategies were incorporated into Gail's classroom. Next, I outline issues related to the combination of comprehension strategy instruction and culturally relevant teaching in one classroom.

### **Incorporating Comprehension Strategies**

While Gail incorporated comprehension strategy instruction into her classroom, she did so first within the context of thematic units and inquiry. These topics typically addressed social studies or science topics. These units were accompanied by large wall charts that clearly identified units of study (e.g., "We're studying slavery while learning summarization"). Additionally, when she taught strategies, she did so explicitly in specific ways that fit into larger goals. These goals were (1) treating reading as a meaning-making process and (2) developing critical, strategic readers.

Gail taught reading primarily through a reader's workshop curricular structure with thematic units embedded. Thus, while comprehension strategies were important to the way Gail taught reading, she structured her literacy curriculum in ways that prevented them from taking center stage. Instead, she sought out ways to teach comprehension strategy instruction within a setting that prioritized meaning making, student choice, student questioning, and a critical stance.

The thematic units treated topics closely related to (in)equity and/or linked to specific cultural groups such as Vietnam, jazz, the civil rights movement, and the environment. The units Gail implemented often included inquiry and big/powerful ideas (Díaz & Flores, 2001; Franquíz, 1999). So, the unit on the civil rights movement was accompanied by the big idea "people who work together in groups can affect change." These topics and their corresponding big ideas allowed Gail to develop students' "sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483) and "nurture and support cultural competence" (p. 483) while also teaching comprehension strategies. These units were often paired with an individual comprehension strategy. For example, a study of Vietnam afforded opportunities to practice the comprehension strategy of questioning across text types.

Gail's read-alouds often fit into these overarching thematic units and were structured in ways that provided for large amounts of student input. Students in this classroom were encouraged to (and did) call out questions and comments about the read-alouds. When I asked Gail to explain why her

read-alouds were so interactive, she replied,

I always feel that if kids aren't talking about the book while I'm reading, then something's wrong; that means they're not engaged. When I read a book with somebody else I'm always talking and thinking out loud and saying things like, well I think that blah, blah, blah, what do you think or why do you think such and such happened because I'm confused. And I'm always doing that. [My boyfriend] and I are reading a book together right now and we're doing that so it just feels natural to me that they do that with each other and with me.

Her need to interact with other readers surrounding shared texts was further evidenced by a book group (made up mostly of fellow elementary teachers) that she had organized. For Gail, interacting with others to make sense of a text was "natural." Gail equated text engagement with talking, and this could be seen in how she structured read-alouds.

The interactive nature of these read-alouds allowed for continuous spontaneous comments and questions. Students called out comments or questions as Shantel did during one read-aloud: "When she said that you're like my family, you're almost like my family, I guess that's what she meant..." In another example, during a section where the children are correcting their parents' English in *Going Home* by Eve Bunting, Salina commented quietly, "I teach my parents to learn English." Questions were also voiced as they occurred to the students. Often these questions related to word meanings as in the following transcript from Gail's classroom:

Gail: ... Howard already has a connection just to the tide. . . . And that's what make us want to read it... it reminds him of the time a stray dog. So what Howard did right here is helping him when he reads this book and he's thinking that the characters.

Nathan: What's stray mean?

Gail: Oh, that's a good question. What docs stray mean?

Danielle: Lost.

Gail: Lost.

Sean: Alone.

Gail: Alone. It doesn't have an owner. It doesn't have a home or anything. It just runs around loose.

As shown in this transcript segment, Gail often waited before responding, providing the opportunity for other students to respond to their peers. Also common, as she did in this instance, was for Gail to take up student words while also expanding on the words provided by the students. Gail also drew on cultural understandings when possible to explain word meanings.

Gail: **When they return for their yearly visit they will find things on the altar that they remember, a photograph, a well-loved article of clothing, a hat, or maybe a favorite shawl.** (Bold print indicates sections that Gail read aloud from the text)

Sylvia: What's a shawl?

Gail: A shawl is a piece of cloth that sometimes women might wear around them to keep them warm. It's not really a coat cause it doesn't have arms. You just kind of put it around you, like a poncho.

Because Gail knew that her students understood the meanings of coat and poncho, she used those as examples to describe shawl's word meaning.

Students' questions also aimed to clear up ideas they did not understand in the text. This transcript demonstrates Melissa asking for clarification of a book Gail was reading about the Mexican and Mexican-American cultural practice of *Día de los Muertos*:

Gail: **The altars, the altars hold all of the dead person's favorite food and treats and toys. This is to welcome them home for one night a year.**

Melissa: Ms. Hunter, I don't get it because like the food would make them mad cause it's like they're teasing them that they're dead and they're alive.

Gail: Hmmm, but I don't think it's meant to be like teasing. I think it's more meant to be

like we're celebrating, this is fun. Like it's ok to be dead because we're celebrating you and the time that you spent on earth.

Gail's read-alouds were filled with instances of students engaging in meaning making as they interacted with texts. Students were held to the high academic expectation of monitoring their own understandings of text while studying topics that are not often included in mainstream curricula. But, as will be seen in the following sections, some of these thematic unit/comprehension strategy pairings fit together more easily than others.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching and Comprehension Strategies From Professional Development Literature**

Comprehension strategies that came from the professional development literature were instantiated in this classroom in ways that offered two distinct possibilities for culturally relevant teaching. First, these comprehension strategies offered avenues for personal narratives and other student knowledge into the meaning-making process. Second, Gail taught them as a tool for making meaning with text, not an end goal.

**Avenue for Personal Narratives and Other Student Knowledge.** This first set of comprehension strategies provided an avenue for students to bring their personal experiences into the classroom. Gail conveyed the opportunity for personal narratives and encouraged its use, in part, through modeling it. She modeled her own personal responses both orally and in writing (on a large chart so students could see). For example, Gail modeled a response to *Going Home* (Bunting, 1996), a book about a family that had immigrated to the United States from a small Mexican village in order to provide their children with better opportunities. In her response, Gail shared with her class the story of how her own family had moved from a small town in Nevada to a suburb of a large Texas town where the educational opportunities would be better for Gail and her brother. Her response also included other big/powerful

ideas from the text (Díaz & Flores, 2001; Franquíz, 1999). She shared how much her parents missed their family and friends in addition to the geographic features of Nevada. Carrying another big theme from the book into her response, she also talked and wrote about how her own parents still considered Nevada home, moving back there after she and her brother graduated from high school, highlighting the idea that parents often make sacrifices so that their children can have better opportunities.

Gail's students picked up the key characteristics from her examples, quickly becoming proficient at bringing their own narratives into their oral responses to text. For example, in response to Gail's read aloud of *My Rotten Red-Headed Older Brother* (Polacco, 1994), Taylor immediately recalled his own sibling relationship.

Taylor: That reminds me of my big sister like we always fight like that. We always bet, like we bet each other like that. And she always wins. She still bes means to me but a little bit, a little bit.

Gail: . . .brother and sister relationships are always pretty similar. There's always lots of righting and lots of teasing but there's also lots of good stuff too. Like sometimes those people are the ones you love more than anyone in the world.

The sharing of a story from a student's personal life was common. As with Taylor's connection here, the stories often related directly to a primary theme of the text. The ability to engage in storytelling, particularly personal narratives, has been demonstrated as a fund of knowledge that many students hold (Martínez-Roldán, 2003). Allowing an avenue for students to access and use these narratives, particularly in response to literature can lead to academic success (Martínez-Roldán, 2003). Gail's recognition of the importance of personal stories helped bridge academic content.

In addition to personal narratives, students often shared their considerable knowledge on topics related to the text. Many students were able to provide additional information because of previous

outside-of-school experiences. This information, which helped all students better understand the text came from such wide-ranging experiences as popular culture sources, religious education, and/or discussions with relatives. For example, during the read-aloud of *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (Polacco, 1994), Mark, who had spent considerable time at a Christian church in the school's neighborhood, provided an explanation for information included in the text. (Bold print indicates those sections Gail read aloud from the text)

Gail: **Passed over, Larnelle. That's why they call this time of year Passover.** Oh, I get it. So they marked the doors saying they were Jewish.

Mark: With blood. They killed their lamb and then they would go around knocking and the blood and then the angel would pass by. So the angel of death when the Egypt people they would kill every firstborn. Cause he said to go, so God said that he would kill every Egypt's firstborn.

Gail: so the reason they call it Passover is because the angel passed over the houses, right.

Gail continuously assumed that her students had considerable background knowledge and their contexts could relate to the contexts of texts. In this instance, she helped Mark link his comments back to the text, as she often did after student comments. In effect, this practice honored student contributions while keeping the focus on meaning making with text. Gail's recognition that her students brought these resources with them into classroom discussions is vital to culturally relevant teaching.

**Comprehension Strategies as Tools.** Gail sought out the professional development books from which she drew the first set of strategies. Because they were not imposed on her, she was able to teach them deliberately but flexibly. In other words, she was able to use them as instructional tools toward other, larger goals (i.e., teaching reading as a meaning-making process and developing

critical, strategic readers.) The immediate reward for these strategies was less pronounced, preventing them from taking priority over more test-oriented reading skills. At one time, Gail abandoned an initial instructional comprehension strategy mid-unit as student interest led the unit's focus in another way. During a reading of *The Lotus Seed* by Sherry Garland in a lesson designed by Harvey and Goudvis (2000) to teach questioning, Gail's students showed considerable interest in the war mentioned in the book. As a result, Gail stopped the lengthy study she had originally planned on questioning (a comprehension strategy) to study the Vietnam War. As can be seen in the next section, students' prior knowledge became more problematic with the comprehension strategies that came from the state standards.

### **Comprehension Strategies from State Standards and Culturally Relevant Teaching**

Student meaning making during those interactive read-alouds that focused on comprehension strategies from the state standards remained an important part of discussions. As in those read-alouds from the previous section, Gail responded to student comments and questions, assuming they made sense. Additionally, as in the first set of comprehension strategies, she often asked clarification questions and made the links explicit between student comments/questions and the text. Three issues arose during these lessons that made culturally relevant teaching more difficult. These issues included (a) the need to stay close to the text, (b) the need for a right answer, and (c) difficulty pairing strategies with thematic topics.

**Need to Stay Close to the Text.** The same sort of space for the sort of personal narratives and bringing in of knowledge gained from out-of-school experiences was not present for those lessons that taught the comprehension strategies from the state standards. The text (often at the paragraph or sentence level) became much more important than the wealth of information brought into the classroom by the students. With this set of comprehension strategies, those comments/questions called out by

students were more closely linked to the text than their own experiences. This transcript comes from an interactive read-aloud around Seymour Simon's *Gorillas* (2003) that focused on word meaning:

Gail: I wouldn't have known what that meant but the author's clues helped me know what that meant

Damien: It said it can canter like a horse.

Gail: Move quickly.

Damien: And it's a male, adult male.

In this instance Damien's comments demonstrated this tendency to stay close to the text when the comprehension strategy lessons dictated. This need to stay close to the text was most likely closely related to this next finding.

**Need for a Right Answer.** One aspect of the comprehension strategies that came from the state standards immediately complicated the instruction that surrounded them; students were expected to master these strategies on a test with multiple-choice questions. As a result, rather than trying to make meaning with text, classroom participants worked toward finding the right answer. At times, this meant setting the usual classroom practice of understanding the text as in this lesson on context clues:

Gail: ..so the context clues are the clues Damien: the author gives you

Gail: Yeah, I like your words. The clues the author gives you to help you understand.

Damien: to understand the story

Gail: Not understand the story. To help you understand what a word means. So if you come to a word that you don't know, you can use those clues to help you understand what a word means.

When the state standards were not the primary focus, word meanings were discussed by classroom

participants and Gail frequently provided the definition. They were a means to an end (to make meaning with the text). This transcript demonstrates, however, Gail's tendency to prioritize the specific comprehension strategy over the larger text meanings in these cases.

**Difficult or Inappropriate Pairings.** Those units of study that focused in on this second set of comprehension strategies, as a whole, did not take place within thematic units that focused in on critical or cultural topics. These thematic units tended to have central topics such as "non-fiction" (as opposed to "civil rights" or "environment"). In the cases when a comprehension strategy from the second set was paired with a topic that could be closely related to a cultural group or issue of social justice. In fact, in the larger ethnographic study, when searching through the data for negative case examples (i.e., those times when Gail's instructional practices could not be seen as culturally relevant), the most salient example was just such a pairing. When Gail paired fact and opinion (listed as a subcategory in the state reading strategy standard) with a *Día de los Muertos* unit in the second year of data collection, problems arose. Even though many of these students celebrated *Día de los Muertos* within their own homes, they seemed to lose trust in their own experiences as they made sense of a text about the holiday. Rather, they looked to Gail for the "right" answer. In spite of the fact that many students talked about their own family celebrations during morning share time, during this read-aloud, students need to complete the task (i.e., finding facts and opinions from the text) prevented them from drawing on their own experiences.

Manuel: So what about for Day of the Dead, they think it is a happy time...

Gail: That's tricky because I could go and I could talk to these people. I could prove it true or false. But it's their opinion that it's a happy time.

Mark: So they, so they think, so what do we write down?

As seen in this transcript, during this lesson, students seemed to trust the teacher more than the

experiences of people in the room. They had given up on making meaning and were just trying to get to the answer Gail was looking for. Mark's question "so what do we write down?" was also indicative of the problematic nature of this lesson. Not only was this not the sort of question that students typically asked in this classroom, it demonstrated that he was unable to complete the task of findings facts and opinions in the text successfully. My fieldnotes at the end of this lesson indicated that neither of the lesson's objectives were accomplished: (1) the students, as a whole, did not understand fact and opinion and (2) the social practice intentions that sparked the *Día de los Muertos* unit were not accomplished. This lesson was particularly striking because in the previous year, *Día de los Muertos* was also included as a thematic unit, but without the accompanying strategy of fact and opinion. Those transcripts included cases of students sharing their own experiences of the holiday and teacher requests that they bring in pictures of their family alters. Cultural insiders were treated as the experts who could help guide all classroom participants toward better understanding.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this particular classroom, two distinct sets of comprehension strategies affected this teacher's culturally relevant teaching differently. Within the first set of comprehension strategies (those that, for Gail, originated in the professional development literature), Gail's students were able to engage at high academic levels while also developing sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence because of the avenues provided for them to build on funds of knowledge and information gained from outside-of-school experiences. The depth of insight students brought to text-related topics because of their previous experiences was astonishing.

With the second set of comprehension strategies (those that came from the state standards), their alignment with culturally relevant teaching was more problematic. It is difficult to

distinguish between the comprehension strategies themselves and the high-stakes test that came with them. Most likely each contributed to the issues. The high stakes test created a context in which students were required to demonstrate that they had mastered the cognitive skill. And, while decades of evidence now exist demonstrating the potential of comprehension strategy instruction to increase student reading comprehension when implemented appropriately (Baker, 2008; Harris & Pressley, 1991; Pearson, 2008; Pressley et al, 1992), it is important to recognize that "researchers are also concerned that metacognition not become an end in itself" (Baker, 2008, p. 42). The test, in effect, did make the comprehension strategies the end goal. Also difficult though, was the focus on small sections of text. These strategies were most problematic when they (a) occurred within small portions of the overall text, (b) occurred within contrived texts, or (c) were geared toward specific final meanings. Indeed, "(their value lies in their social nature, in that students and teachers can 'publicly\* share, evaluate, and understand the functions and the value of the strategies" (Dole et al., 2008, np).

Culturally relevant pedagogy has tended to stay at the broad level of classroom procedures and teacher characteristics (Jiménez & Gersten, 1999). As a result, "despite a move toward viewing culture as an asset, very little research has investigated exactly how culture can be positively used in the classroom" (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003, p. 265). These findings provide some evidence that comprehension strategy instruction can provide avenues for students to bring an interactional strength (i.e., telling personal narratives) and information gained from personal experiences into their learning. In those same cases, comprehension strategy instruction also aligned nicely with thematic units focused on topics related to developing students' cultural competence and critical consciousness, key components of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Many teachers negotiate competing goals as a necessary part of everyday classroom life. However a teacher chooses to structure her reading curriculum, those choices both provide opportunities and close off possibilities. As a result, like Handsfield and Jiménez (2008), I am cautious about recommending comprehension strategy instruction without qualifications.

This analysis focused in on the content of the classroom interactions within one teacher's read-alouds over two years. Following, while much can be learned about how comprehension instruction played out in this classroom, many questions remain. For example—What percentage of classroom teachers even attempt to address the research-based comprehension strategies? To what degree do classroom teachers feel that room exists in crowded literacy curricula to bring in another set of strategies?

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#### Appendix: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills—Third Grade

§110.5. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 3.

(b) Knowledge and skills.

(9) Reading/comprehension. The student uses a variety of strategies to comprehend selections read aloud and selections read independently. The student is expected to:

A. use prior knowledge to anticipate meaning and make sense of texts (K-3);

B. establish purposes for reading and listening such as to be informed, to follow directions, and to be entertained (K-3);

C. retell or act out the order of important events in stories (K-3);

D. monitor his/her own comprehension and act purposefully when comprehension breaks down using such strategies as rereading, searching for clues, and asking for help (1-3);

E. draw and discuss visual images based on text descriptions (1-3);

F. make and explain inferences from texts such as determining important ideas, causes and effects, making predictions, and drawing conclusions (1-3);

G. identify similarities and differences across texts such as in topics, characters, and

themes (3);

H. produce summaries of text selections (2-3);

I. represent text information in different ways, including story maps, graphs, and charts (2-3);

J. distinguish fact from opinion in various texts, including news stories and advertisements (3);

and

K. practice different kinds of questions and tasks, including test-like comprehension questions (3).