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RESEARCH BASE

FOR

Critical Reading: Differentiated Instruction Across Genres

Joan Irwin, B.A., M.Ed

299 Market Street • Saddle Brook • NJ 07663

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Critical Reading: Differentiated Instruction Across Genres

Evidence of Research Base Joan Irwin, B.A, M.Ed

Introduction

A primary goal of reading instruction is to develop readers who are capable of reading and responding critically to a variety of texts. To become accomplished readers, students must have opportunities to acquire a repertoire of strategies that enable them to cope with materials of increasing difficulty as they progress through school. Critical readers demonstrate an array of interpretive skills including the ability to explain details, infer, link personal experience to text, make connections within and across texts, and form conclusions based on different perspectives.

Teachers who teach for meaning and emphasize critical thinking skills in their lessons provide opportunities for students to become independent readers. The link between instruction that focuses on meaning and student achievement has been demonstrated in recent analyses of NAEP data. These data reveal that teaching for meaning is associated with higher NAEP test scores (Wenglinsky, 2004; Perie, et al., 2005b). Notably, “in both 4th and 8th grades, NAEP scores in comprehension favor teaching for meaning. Students tended to perform better on NAEP comprehension questions when they had experienced instruction in metacognitive skills (drawing meaning from text by asking questions, summarizing the work, identifying key themes, and thinking critically about the author’s purpose and whether that purpose was achieved)” (Wenglinsky, 2004).

The content of the NAEP reading assessment provides insight into the types of reading performance on which students will be evaluated in other high-stakes tests (Perie et al., 2005a). Both the fourth-grade and eighth-grade assessments measure reading performance in two dimensions: contexts for reading and aspects for reading. At the fourth-grade level the contexts for reading include reading for literary experience (55% of the test items) and reading for information (45% of the items). The aspects of reading measure forming a general understanding and developing interpretation (60%), making reader/text connections (15%), and examining content and structure (25%). At the eighth-grade level the contexts for reading include reading for literary experience (40%), reading for information

(40%), and reading to perform a task (20%). The aspects of reading include forming a general understanding and developing interpretation (55%), making reader/text connections (15%), and examining content and structure (30%). The differences between the two grades reflect the developmental differences between fourth- and eighth-grade students and the different expectations for students in reading.

Critical Reading provides teachers and students with resources that build higher-level reading skills such as those represented in selected tasks on NAEP and other recognized assessments. However, the goal of instruction is not just to have students perform better on high-stakes assessments. The overall goal is to foster students’ reading development to enable them to participate successfully in literacy activities both in and out of school. Consequently, instructional practices and materials must provide students with experiences that build comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension research indicates that direct, explicit instruction is essential to enable students to master challenging texts. The National Reading Panel (2000) highlighted the role of the teacher in delivering strategy instruction:

Strategic reading requires strategic teaching, which involves putting teachers in positions where their minds are the most valued educational resource. Skilled reading is constructive reading, and the activities of the reader matter (4-49).

Similarly, the RAND Reading Study Group (2002) addressed aspects of appropriate instruction that foster reading comprehension. Focusing on instruction in the content areas, the authors observed:

...although teachers may focus their content area instruction on helping students understand the material, an important concurrent goal is helping students learn how to become self-regulated, active readers who have a variety of strategies to help them comprehend (p. 14).

In addition to identifying ways in which teachers can successfully lead students to achieve reading proficiency, the National Reading Panel listed eight cognitive strategies for improving reading comprehension: comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organizers, question answering, question generating, story structure, and summarization as well as multiple strategies in which readers and teachers interact with texts (pp. 4–6). *Critical Reading provides explicit instruction in strategies for critical reading of content selected from both fiction and nonfiction genres.* This instruction reflects strategies identified by the National Reading Panel:

1. The development of an awareness and understanding of the reader’s own cognitive processes that are amenable to instruction and learning;
2. A teacher guiding the reader or modeling for the reader the actions that the reader can take to enhance the comprehension processes used during reading;
3. The reader practicing those strategies until the reader achieves a gradual internalization and independent mastery of those processes (pp. 4–40).

These instructional practices also acknowledge the elements of comprehension described by the RAND Reading Study Group (2002):

Comprehension entails three elements:

1. The *reader* who is doing the comprehending;
2. The *text* that is to be comprehended;
3. The *activity* in which comprehension is a part (p. 11).

As students advance through elementary grades into middle school, they encounter increasingly sophisticated reading material as well as heightened expectations to read critically. Reports about the number of students who lack literacy skills are commonplace. Such reports raise concerns among educators, policy makers, and parents about the extent to which a literacy crisis exists. *Reading Next* (2004), a report about adolescent literacy, identified comprehension as the primary problem facing students in middle and secondary schools. The panel noted “...older struggling readers and writers can *read*, but cannot *understand* what they read” (p. 10). Consistent with the findings of the National Reading Panel and the RAND Reading Study Group, this panel stated that effective adolescent literacy interventions must provide direct, explicit comprehension

instruction in which various approaches are used. Specifically the Study Group identified the following instructional factors:

1. Comprehension strategies instruction, which is instruction that explicitly gives students strategies that aid them in comprehending a variety of texts;
2. Comprehension monitoring and metacognition instruction, which is instruction that teaches students to become aware of how they understand while they read;
3. Teacher modeling, which involves the teacher reading texts aloud, making her own use of strategies and practices apparent to her students;
4. Scaffolded instruction, which involves teachers giving high support for students practicing new skills and then slowly decreasing that support to increase student ownership and self-sufficiency; and
5. Apprenticeship models, which involve teachers engaging students in a content-centered learning relationship (pp. 13–14).

Instruction that is responsive to learner need is another aspect of research that is relevant to reading instruction. Tomlinson (1999) points out that “in differentiated classrooms, teachers begin where students are, not the front of the curriculum guide” (p. 2). To accomplish differentiation, teachers can apply a range of instructional and management strategies including tiered lessons, tiered products, varied texts, and varied questioning strategies. Looking at successful reading programs, Allington (2003) noted that exemplary teachers don’t use scripted, one-size-fits-all instructional materials. These teachers focus on engaging students with reading and writing in the content areas. In reviewing research on differentiated instruction, Tomlinson (2006) identifies three overlapping areas in which students differ—readiness, interest, and learning profile. A number of research studies indicate that students learn more effectively when teachers diagnose a student’s skill level and assign appropriate tasks as well as providing a structure that matches a student’s level of development. Interest in what they are learning, understanding and using strategies successfully, and a sense of accomplishment are significant motivational factors that can encourage students to pursue more complex tasks. The ways in which students best process what they learn are shaped by several factors including a person’s gender, culture, learning

style, and intelligence preference. Sternberg (1997) reported that students at all levels achieved significantly better than peers in control groups when classroom instruction was matched to their preferred learning patterns (i.e., analytical, creative, or practical). The realities of contemporary classrooms provide evidence of the necessity to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the diverse student population with strategies, content, and instructional format of *Critical Reading: Differentiated Instruction Across Genres* provide teachers with resources that will enable them to direct and support their students' reading development.

Critical Reading is a supplemental reading program, aligned to state standards and designed to help teachers “unpack” the

Brief Overview of Program

Critical Reading provides explicit directions for practices that will enable students to develop skills for achieving proficiency in reading both fiction and nonfiction material. Questions within each Student Unit address six facets of understanding based on the work of Wiggins and McTighe (1998) and are designed to help students master critical reading skills. These facets of understanding include explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. Examples of questions that target each facet are provided in the Teacher Edition. Lessons in individual Student Units systematically teach critical reading skills using scaffolded instruction in which students are guided through materials and strategies that progressively increase in difficulty. The Teacher Edition provides suggestions for helping students become critical readers of a variety of genres. The lessons, customized to state standards, are organized in eight units that can be used flexibly within a four-week period. Charts for unit and lesson pacing facilitate teachers' planning.

Each level of *Critical Reading* is comprised of eight Student Units that focus on select critical reading skills and strategies readers must use to develop those skills. Each unit begins with an introductory lesson that describes the critical reading skill for that unit and includes a read-aloud through which the teacher can model fluent reading. The unit develops with three core lessons based on a wide variety of genres: fiction ranging from folktale to mystery, nonfiction including both literary and nonliterary forms, and poetry. The instructional pattern includes activities before reading, during reading, and after reading. At the end of each unit, a review lesson features one or two reading selections

critical reader in every student. Intended for students in grades 3–5, *Critical Reading* features systematic and explicit instruction in strategies that enable students to acquire essential critical reading skills. The lessons, based on research described in national reports, reflect best practices in comprehension instruction. In addition to instructional resources, *Critical Reading* includes formal assessments aligned to state tests and available in both print and online formats. Furthermore, *Critical Reading* includes suggestions for differentiating instruction and supporting English language learners. The inclusion of every learner is an important theme in this program.

in the unit genre or genres. Here students apply their understanding of the strategy and demonstrate their skill through responses to both reading and writing tasks.

Assessment tools are integral to the Teacher Edition. Informal assessment elements are included in each lesson. Formal assessment components include pretest, posttest, and P3™—Personal Prescriptive Path® and are available in both print and online forms. These formal tools are customized for state assessments. These resources are designed to help teachers differentiate instruction as well as assess student progress in acquiring the strategies and skills presented in the program.

Differentiated instruction across genres is the primary focus of Critical Reading. Lessons are structured to provide multiple opportunities for the teacher to observe student reading behavior and modify instruction as needed. Special features in the Teacher Edition focus on differentiating instruction—Strategy Focus, Mini-Lessons, Include Every Learner, and Rubric: Response Evaluation.

Critical Reading is a resource that supports teachers in providing explicit instruction for all students. Although the program is intended for student learning, the Teacher Edition is designed to foster and refine teacher knowledge of effective comprehension strategies and instructional procedures (Davis & Krajcik, 2005). Specifically, the Teacher Edition reflects guidelines for the design of educative curriculum materials that takes into account both pedagogical and content knowledge. Instructional suggestions help teachers recognize

and interpret what students think about or do in response to selected activities, support teachers' understanding of comprehension strategies, provide a structure for ways to integrate multiple strategies across content, speak directly to teachers about the ideas underlying the tasks, and offer ideas that

teachers can use in other areas of the curriculum. A supplemental program aligned to state standards and customized to state assessments, *Critical Reading* puts into practice research findings about effective comprehension instruction as well as guidelines about the design of curriculum materials.

Alignment with Research in Reading Comprehension Instruction

The instructional design of *Critical Reading* is supported by research in reading comprehension instruction that has been described in reports from the National Reading Panel, Reading Next, and the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth as well as in such scholarly volumes as the *Handbook of Reading Research*, Volume III and *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, fifth edition. The common findings from these reports provide the topics for the description of the alignment of *Critical Reading* with research. These topics represent a model of comprehension instruction that includes five components (Duke & Pearson, 2002), all of which are found in the lesson structure used in *Critical Reading*:

1. An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used;
2. Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action;
3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action;
4. Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility;
5. Independent use of the strategy.

The headings for the description of how *Critical Reading* aligns with research are drawn from the National Reading Panel (2000).

1. Providing Explicit, Direct Instruction in Reading Strategies

Explicit instruction in reading comprehension has been a major research topic for the past three decades. The research findings indicate that explicit, direct instruction enables students to identify the behaviors they need to perform in order to understand what they are reading. The process of explicit instruction follows a pattern typified by direct explanation of the strategy, teacher modeling, guided

practice, and application within a context that encourages students to learn how to monitor and regulate their reading behavior. The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) noted “appropriate instruction will foster reading comprehension, which is defined in two ways—the comprehension of the text under current consideration and comprehension capacities more generally” (p. 13). In *Reading Next* (2004) the authors list direct, explicit instruction as the first of fifteen important elements aimed at improving middle and high school literacy achievement. Several approaches can be used: comprehension strategies instruction, comprehension monitoring and metacognition instruction, teacher modeling, scaffolded instruction, and apprenticeship models. The authors emphasize the role of strategy instruction in both language arts and content area classes so that students learn to comprehend both narrative and informational texts. The National Reading Panel (2000) summarized the value of explicit instruction: “The instruction of cognitive strategies improves reading comprehension in readers with a range of abilities” (pp. 4–47). The Panel’s review of research led to the conclusion that “when readers are given cognitive strategy instruction, they make significant gains on measures of reading comprehension over students trained with conventional instruction procedures” (pp. 4–40).

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (2005) supports instruction that provides substantial coverage in the key components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel. An important finding that emerges from the research this literacy panel reviewed is that text-level skills—reading comprehension and writing—are not taught well enough for language-minority students to match the levels of proficiency achieved by native English speakers. The Panel asserts “Literacy programs that provide instructional support of oral language development in

English, along with high-quality instruction in literacy skills and strategies, are the most successful” (August, p. 5). Hawkins (2004) presents a case for classroom environments that promote “scaffolded interaction” where “communities of learners” engage in a range of language and literacy activities.

The *Critical Reading* Teacher Edition provides explicit lesson plans within a unit organization. Each unit targets a specific critical reading skill and companion reading strategies using high-interest fiction and nonfiction selections. Aligned to state standards, each core lesson’s instructional plan for guided practice consists of three parts: *Before Reading*—explicit instruction about the **lesson’s critical reading skill and the genre of the lesson’s reading selection**, pre-teaching selected vocabulary, and eliciting prior knowledge. *During Reading*—modeling the strategy, scaffolding student learning, monitoring comprehension, and understanding the genre. *After Reading*—guiding students in fluent reading, generating questions, describing what they did as they read, and checking on comprehension. The *Review* lesson at the conclusion of each unit follows the same instructional pattern with similar **guidance** for the teacher.

Critical Reading is comprised of eight units that focus on critical reading skills that will enable students to develop six facets of understanding: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge.

2. Monitoring Comprehension

The ability to monitor comprehension and regulate one’s reading are hallmarks of proficient readers. Teachers can instruct students in strategies that help them to become aware of their understanding during reading and to develop procedures to deal with problems in understanding as they arise. Block and Pressley (2003) state:

Monitoring one’s reading is the ability to discern which types of text are most interesting, which authorial writing patterns one most enjoys, which environmental conditions can minimize distractions when one reads, and which processes are needed to increase one’s motivation and comprehension when reading becomes difficult (p. 116).

The National Reading Panel’s findings support strategies for comprehension monitoring within a program of instruction

that “employs flexibility and the teaching of multiple comprehension strategies” (pp. 4–44). To help students develop skill in regulating their reading, teachers can demonstrate several methods of gaining meaning when confusion arises: for example, examining word recognition, exploring vocabulary terms, using graphic and context clues, clarifying purposes for reading, recalling prior knowledge, rereading, visualizing, selecting another strategy, and self-questioning (Pressley, 2002b; Hacker, 2004). Scaffolding students’ comprehension of text is an essential strategy in helping students to learn how to monitor their reading (Clark & Graves, 2004). The metacognitively skilled reader uses knowledge about reading and how reading is accomplished (Pressley, 2002a).

The activities in the *Critical Reading* Student Units support development of self-monitoring comprehension skills through systematic scaffolding within the lessons. *Reader’s Guide* prompts in each lesson scaffold strategy instruction and make students aware of ways to monitor their comprehension. *Check Your Understanding* and *Deepen Your Comprehension* questions can be used for student conferences, mini-lessons, and informal assessments. **Pretests and posttests provide information that allows teachers to track student progress from their start of the program through completion.**

3. Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers

The National Reading Panel’s findings indicate that graphic and semantic organizers are effective in helping readers improve memory and comprehension of text. Notably, “teaching students to organize the ideas that they are reading about in a systematic, visual graph benefits the ability of the students to remember what they have read and may transfer, in general, to better comprehension and achievement in Social Studies and Science content areas” (pp. 4–45). These findings support the inclusion of informational selections in the reading program as well as the application of comprehension strategies in content area teaching. Strategies that focus learning on informational text structure combined with visual representations have a positive impact on comprehension (Duke, 2004; Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Critical Reading Student Units include *Getting Organized*, a section that uses graphic and semantic organizers to help students interpret what they have read, relate reading to

writing, and apply critical reading strategies. *From Reading to Writing* includes graphic and semantic organizers that enable students to link their reading and writing experiences.

4. Answering Questions and Generating Questions

Traditionally, having students answer teacher-created questions has been an accepted practice for guiding as well as assessing student comprehension. Research evidence indicates that teacher questioning may best be used as part of a multiple-strategy instructional program (National Reading Panel, 2000; Stahl, 2004). However, questioning strategies need to play a more significant role in helping students to become critical readers. Hacker (2004) notes that questioning is one way of encouraging self-regulation of meaning-making and interpretation. Similarly, Block and Pressley (2003) provide examples of specific types of questions that students can ask themselves as they read as a way of ensuring effective comprehension. The National Reading Panel (2000) cited research that demonstrated the effectiveness of asking readers to generate questions during reading. Furthermore, the benefits of question generation are evident in the context of reciprocal teaching activities (Brown et al., 2004).

Critical Reading lessons guide students with questions in each section—before reading, during reading, and after reading. These questions provide models that students can learn to incorporate into their thinking as they read independently. The *Reader's Guide* used during reading focuses students' attention on the strategy and features of the genre. These prompts are intended to help students acquire the skill to regulate their reading. *Checking Your Understanding*, *Deepening Your Understanding*, and *Getting Organized* activities provide practice in responding to questions and summarizing information. *Questions for the Six Facets of Understanding* in the Teacher Edition provides examples of types of questions that help students develop critical reading skills. These resources related to questions can be used in a variety of situations including reading conferences, modeling how to formulate questions, assessing comprehension, and preparing for inquiry projects. **Within the *During Reading* section of each lesson, the *Strategy Focus* activity provides models for students to use to generate questions as they read. The *Respond to Selection* activity can be used as another model to help students generate questions.**

5. Recognizing Text Structure

The National Reading Panel (2000) reported research that addressed story structure. Using story structure the reader learns to ask and answer who, what, where, when, and why questions about the plot and, in some cases, maps out the time line, characters, and events in stories (pp. 4–6). Recent investigations into the use of informational text in reading instruction have produced new awareness of the importance of recognizing text structure as an aid to effective comprehension (Duke, 2004; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Kletzien & Dreher, 2004; Stahl, 2004). According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), knowledge of text structure is an important factor in fostering comprehension. As students advance to upper elementary and middle school, they are expected to read expository material in content areas. This material features relatively long passages, less familiar vocabulary, dense concepts, and complex and varied structures. Consequently, explicit instruction is needed to help students read and comprehend these texts in a coherent and organized way (Meyer & Poon, 2004).

Critical Reading features a wide variety of genres classified according to form (prose or poetry) and basis in truth (fiction or nonfiction). Using a variety of genres diversifies instructional opportunities and helps students recognize that skills they learn in reading class can be used in other classes. The Teacher Edition provides text organization mini-lessons to help teachers provide explicit instruction in text structures such as captions, interior monologue, and headings. **Notably, the *Before Reading* section of each lesson provides explicit instruction in genre and text structure.**

6. Summarizing

The National Reading Panel (2000) reported that summarizing, a task that students generally find difficult, helps them to recall what is read. The Panel recommended that teachers provide explicit instruction in summarization. Duke and Pearson (2002) identify two major approaches to the teaching of summarization—rule-governed and holistic—both of which have been shown to be effective in improving students' written summaries of text as well as their comprehension measured by a standardized test.

Critical Reading units conclude with Review, a component in which students demonstrate their independence in using

the targeted strategy as well as their understanding of the text genre. Activities in *Getting Organized* and *From Reading to Writing* guide students through the use of graphic organizers to summarize and apply what they have read in each selection.

7. Cooperative Learning

Research on cooperative learning began in the early 1970s and most of that research has been sustained over time. These studies show a positive correlation between cooperative learning and achievement (Walters, 2000). The National Reading Panel (2000) reported studies in which students worked cooperatively on the use of reading strategies. Social interaction with peers and more control over their learning are notable benefits of cooperative learning for students. The research indicated that the cooperative learning groups produced increases in the learning of reading strategies, promoted intellectual discussion, and increased reading comprehension (pp. 4–45).

Critical Reading includes several opportunities for paired and small-group work. *Get Organized* and *From Reading to Writing* activities can be used with small groups. Students can listen to the read-aloud selection from the Audio CD and talk about it with peers. Students can share their answers to *Reader's Guide*, *Check Your Understanding*, *Deepen Your Understanding*, and *Get Organized*. The teacher can use the *Rubric: Response Evaluation* to help students evaluate their own writing as well as that of their peers in peer writing and review activities.

Table 1 provides a correlation of the findings of national literacy panels and how *Critical Reading* addresses the research in its program components and activities.

TABLE 1
How Critical Reading Aligns with Reading Comprehension Research

Reading Comprehension Research Findings	Critical Reading Components
<p>Providing Explicit, Direct Instruction in Critical Reading Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Critical Reading</i> Teacher Edition provides explicit lesson plans. The lessons feature a consistent format: Before Reading—teachers introduce the strategy, pre-teach selected vocabulary, and guide students in activating prior knowledge; During Reading—teachers model the strategy, scaffold students’ reading, monitor comprehension, and generate questions; After Reading—teachers guide students in fluent reading, generating questions and describing their reading strategies, and check on comprehension. • Suggestions for extending instruction through mini-lessons and discussions of facets of critical reading augment the core elements of each lesson. • <i>Use Strategies to Understand What You Read</i> at the beginning of the Student Unit is a summary of what students should do before, during, and after reading a selection.
<p>Monitoring Comprehension</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical Reading</i> Student Units include Reader’s Guide prompts in each lesson. These prompts scaffold strategy instruction and make students aware of ways to monitor their comprehension. • <i>Check Your Understanding</i> provides multiple-choice questions to check on comprehension. <i>Deepen Your Understanding</i> provides opportunity for students to construct responses to questions about the selection. These comprehension tasks are comparable to those students will encounter on state assessments. • The Teacher Edition includes suggestions for differentiating instruction to accommodate English language learners as well as kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learners. • The Teacher Edition includes rubrics to evaluate student responses.
<p>Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each unit in <i>Critical Reading</i> includes <i>Getting Organized</i>, a section that uses graphic and semantic organizers to help students interpret what they have read and apply critical reading strategies. • The graphic organizers vary according to the type of reading material and skill level. • <i>From Reading to Writing</i> activities use various graphic organizer formats that enable students to recall and summarize what they have read.

Reading Comprehension Research Findings

Critical Reading Components

Answering Questions and Generating Questions

- *Critical Reading* lessons guide students with questions in each section—before reading, during reading, and after reading. The *Reader’s Guide* used during reading focuses students’ attention on the strategy. *Strategy Focus*, which accompanies During Reading activities, provides opportunities for students to form questions and think through their use of a selected strategy.
- *Check Your Understanding*, *Deepen Your Understanding*, and *Get Organized* activities provide practice in responding to questions and summarizing information.
- *Questions for the Six Facets of Understanding* in the Teacher Edition provides examples of types of questions that help students develop critical reading skills.
- *Respond to Selection* activity provides examples of questions that students can use as models to generate their own questions.

Recognizing Text Structure

- *Critical Reading* lessons include two mini-lessons—one that focuses on text features and another that focuses on text genre. These mini-lessons extend the focus on text structure that is integral to the components of each core lesson.
- Genre study is included in the introduction to each unit. This explanation focuses students’ attention on the characteristics of the genre and enables them to learn how to adjust their reading behaviors to meet the demands of different genres.

Summarizing

- *Critical Reading* units conclude with Review, a component in which students can demonstrate their independence in using the targeted strategy as well as their understanding of the text genre.
- Graphic organizers in *Get Organized* and *From Reading to Writing* activities provide practical vehicles that help students recall and summarize what they have read.

Cooperative Learning

- *Get Organized* and *From Reading to Writing* provide opportunities for students to participate in small group activities.
- *Rubric: Response Evaluation* can be adapted for students to use in peer writing activities.

Alignment with Research about Instructional Strategies

Research has also examined what teachers do to teach comprehension strategies. Durkin (1978–79) described a situation in which teachers did not teach students how to comprehend; rather, they tested comprehension. Despite the wealth of information about teaching comprehension strategies published during the past 25 years, there is little evidence about teachers' instruction that negates Durkin's earlier findings (Pressley, 2002a). In order for students to become self-regulated readers who can independently apply critical reading strategies, teachers must provide instructional experiences that foster such behaviors. The nature of these experiences has been described in reports from the National Reading Panel (2000), Reading Next (2004), and the RAND Study Group (2002). The findings from these reports indicate that effective teachers engage in a diverse array of instructional practices using a variety of texts. These

practices include scaffolding student learning, using diverse texts, differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students, helping readers make connections between the texts they read and their personal experiences, and continually assessing student progress (Biancarosa, 2005; Block & Pressley, 2003; Brown et al, 2004; Clark & Graves, 2004; Duke & Pearson, 2002). Pressley (2002b) hypothesized that if teachers taught students the skills and knowledge demonstrated by successful readers, students' comprehension would be much improved. *Critical Reading* is designed to help teachers fulfill the expectations of Pressley's hypothesis as well as to meet the standards set by research.

Table 2 presents six research-based instructional strategies and explains how *Critical Reading* components and activities implement these strategies.

TABLE 2
How Critical Reading aligns with Research-Based Instructional Strategies

Research-Based Comprehension Instructional Strategies	<i>Critical Reading</i> Components
Scaffolded Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical Reading</i> is organized in units whose components scaffold student learning through material that increases in difficulty throughout the unit. • The <i>Unit Introduction Lesson</i> provides explicit instruction to acquaint students with the unit’s critical reading skill. This introduction is followed by a read-aloud selection read by the teacher or played for students from the Audio CD. The read-aloud selection familiarizes students with the genre of the reading selection in Lesson 1 of the unit. • Each of the unit’s three <i>Core Lessons</i> begins with explicit instruction in the lesson’s critical reading skill and the genre of the reading selection. • <i>Reader’s Guide</i> questions coach students in practicing the lesson skill as they read. • After reading, students respond to the selection by answering <i>Check Your Understanding</i> and <i>Deepen Your Understanding</i> questions, by using a graphic organizer to analyze and display selection ideas, and by creating a written analysis or other type of written response to the selection. • Each unit concludes with a Review Lesson in which students can apply the unit skills independently.
Diverse Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical Reading</i> uses high interest selections to systematically and explicitly teach critical reading strategies. The program features a wide variety of genres classified according to form (prose or poetry) and basis in truth (fiction or nonfiction). • Teacher Edition contains a summary of the genres used at each level of the program as well as descriptions of selected genres within each category of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.
Effective Instruction for All Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Critical Reading</i> core lessons and unit review are augmented with suggestions designed to differentiate instruction. The entire program should be used for differentiating reading instruction. • The format of this program is <i>designed</i> for individual, differentiated instruction. Scaffolded instruction provides guidance for students at various phases of reading the selections. <i>Mini-Lessons</i> can be used selectively to meet the needs of individual students. Core lessons can be used with small groups or individuals according to their needs.

- *Include Every Learner* notes (in the Teacher Edition) help teachers to customize instruction according to English language proficiency and learning style (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). Additional suggestions are provided for helping ELL students explain language and cultural nuances that may be confusing to them.
- *Alternative Teaching Strategies* (in the Teacher Edition) include using gestures, body language, and pictures.

Making Use of Prior Knowledge

- *Before the Read-Aloud* and *Strategy Focus* activities in the Teacher Edition provide prompts for the teacher to use to help students draw upon personal knowledge of the topic, genre, and lesson skill.
- Drawing upon and activating prior knowledge are the primary focus of *Before Reading* activities presented in the Teacher Edition.

Ongoing Formative Assessment of Students

- Teacher-generated questions guide student discussion of the selection and examination of their use of the critical reading strategy as they complete the *Reader's Guide*, *Check Your Understanding*, *Deepen Your Understanding*, and *Get Organized*.
- The Review Lesson activities in the Student Unit provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their ability to use the critical reading strategy independently.
- The *Rubric: Response Evaluation* provides criteria on which the teacher can judge student writing. Based on these evaluations, the teacher can shape instruction to meet the needs of individual students.

Ongoing Summative Assessment of Students

- Pretests and posttests available online and as blackline masters in the Teacher Edition assess student knowledge of the critical reading strategies and skills taught in the program. Both tests are customized to the format of specific state high-stakes tests.

Conclusion

The development of critical reading skills is a long-term developmental process that requires dedicated instruction with ample opportunities for students to read and respond to a wide variety of materials. The research in reading comprehension provides compelling evidence about the role of the teacher in providing explicit, direct instruction, scaffolding students' comprehension, and using assessment tools to inform instruction.

Critical Reading: Differentiated Instruction Across Genres is a supplemental program designed to help students in grades 3–5 acquire the requisite skills for personal and academic success. The program is designed to teach essential critical reading

strategies and skills through high interest-fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections. *Critical Reading* is aligned with state standards and includes customized features such as pretests, posttests, standards listings at point of use, and correlation charts of standards and skills included in the program. The goal of *Critical Reading* is to enable teachers to implement research-based instruction and to help students to read for meaning and to use higher-level reasoning skills—to become critical readers.

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