



When Understanding Doesn't Transfer to Instruction

Based on Know Better, Do Better: Comprehension

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Purpose

To support teachers in translating what we know about reading comprehension into instructional practices that intentionally build meaning, rather than relying on isolated strategies or skills.

Key Understanding

Comprehension improves when instruction is intentionally designed to support meaning before, during, and after reading. Rather than teaching comprehension as a set of strategies applied after text is read, Know Better, Do Better emphasizes integrating word reading, language development, vocabulary, sentence understanding, and knowledge building within instruction.

When these components are aligned, students are more likely to understand what they read and apply their understanding across texts.

Teacher Reflection Questions

- Do my comprehension lessons focus more on strategies than on understanding the text itself?
- How intentionally do I support language, vocabulary, and knowledge before students read?
- Are students given opportunities to discuss ideas and meaning during reading—not just after?
- Do my instructional routines help students make sense of increasingly complex text?
- Where might my instruction assume understanding that hasn't been built yet?

What to Look for in Students

- Apply strategies inconsistently or without understanding
- Struggle to explain meaning even after completing comprehension tasks
- Rely on surface-level responses rather than deeper explanations
- Show confusion when texts increase in complexity
- Perform better when instruction includes discussion and explicit meaning-making

These patterns suggest a need to shift instruction from strategy use to intentional comprehension building.

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