

# Reading Power

*Teaching Students to Think While They Read*

Adrienne Gear

© Hawker Brownlow Education



# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
Comprehension Research	9
How the Reading Power Program Began	11
<b>1 What is Reading Power?</b>	<b>13</b>
Reading, Thinking, and Teaching	13
Current Reading Practice	15
Teaching the Reading Powers	16
Using Reading Power	16
Metacognition	17
<b>2 The Components of the Reading Power Program</b>	<b>19</b>
The Reading Powers Model	19
Helping Students become Metacognitive	19
The Big Picture: Introducing the Thinking Brain	21
The Reading Power Theme Song	23
The Reading Power Book Bins	24
Top Picks for Reading Power: Primary	25
Top Picks for Reading Power: Intermediate/Secondary	26
Creating a Book Bin Collection	27
Reading Power Instruction	28
Modeling	28
Components of Reading Power Instruction	32
<b>3 The Power to Connect</b>	<b>35</b>
Introducing the Power to Connect	36
Sequential Lessons for Connecting	38
Connect Booklist	43
<b>4 The Power to Question</b>	<b>53</b>
Introducing the Power to Question	55
Sequential Lessons for Questioning	55
Question Booklist	59
<b>5 The Power to Visualize</b>	<b>67</b>
Introducing the Power to Visualize	68
Sequential Lessons for Visualizing	70
Visualize Booklist	75
<b>6 The Power to Infer</b>	<b>83</b>
Introducing the Power to Infer	84
Sequential Lessons for Inferring	85
Infer Booklist	92

<b>7 The Power to Transform</b>	<b>99</b>
Introducing the Power to Transform	101
Sequential Lessons for Transforming	103
Transform Booklist	108
<b>8 Application and Assessment</b>	<b>117</b>
Application	117
Using the Reading Powers	117
Combined Reading Powers Booklist	117
Using Reading Power with Novels	120
Lessons for Literature Circles	121
Lit Circle Snapshot	121
Recommended Books for Lit Circles	122
Reading Power and Parents	124
Assessment	130
Goals of Reading Comprehension	130
<b>Final Thoughts</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>139</b>
Professional Resources	139
Children's Books	140

© Hawker Brownlow Education

# Introduction

“The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Influenced by the book *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis (2000), and by the work of many researchers in the field of reading comprehension, including David Pearson, the Reading Power program is designed to teach specific strategies to use during the reading process that enable students to engage in a more interactive, thoughtful reading experience and to improve comprehension. Central to the program is authentic children’s literature for modeling demonstrations, practice, and independent reading.

## Comprehension Research

“No matter how important code is, it is not the point of reading.”

—David Pearson

In the 1970s, an educator and researcher by the name of David Pearson, at the time a professor at the University of Michigan, embarked on a study of proficient readers. In lay terms, he wanted to know what made “this child” a better reader than all “these other children.” What was it that a reader, exceeding expectations for his or her grade level, was doing that enabled him or her to master both the code and the meaning of the text? During this extensive study, his team of researchers studied hundreds of proficient readers and, after many years and an enormous amount of data, determined several common strategies used by proficient readers that enabled them to make sense of the text. A condensed version of this research is what I describe as the “profile” of a proficient reader.

### Profile of a Proficient Reader

A good reader is **metacognitive**—aware of and able to use and articulate the following strategies in order to interact with the text and enhance meaning.

1. **Make Connections.** A good reader is able to draw from background knowledge and personal experiences while reading to help create meaning from the text.
2. **Ask Questions.** A good reader asks both literal and inferential questions before, during, and after reading to clarify meaning and deepen understanding.
3. **Visualize.** A good reader is able to create multi-sensory images in the “mind’s eye” while reading to help make sense of the text.
4. **Determine Importance.** A good reader is able to sort through information in the text, select key ideas, and remember them.
5. **Draw Inferences.** A good reader knows that not all information is included in a text, and is able to reasonably “fill in,” hypothesize, and predict, based on evidence in the text.

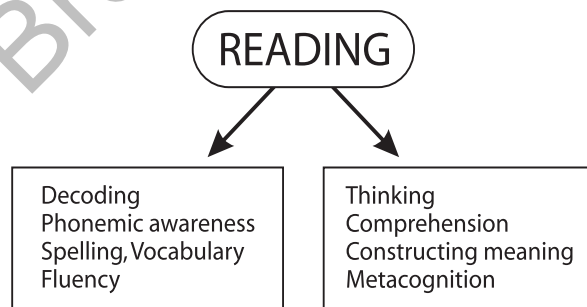
**6. Analyze and Synthesize.** A good reader is able to break down information and to draw conclusions based on both the text and his or her own thinking.

**7. Monitor Comprehension.** A good reader is aware when understanding is being compromised and is able to stop, go back, and reread in order for understanding to occur.

Thirty years later, David Pearson's research is now finding its way into teacher education, professional development, and classroom practice. The common strategies used by proficient readers are now being taught to readers of all grades and all levels of reading. Simply stated, if these strategies are what research has found to what good readers do to understand text, then this is what we need to be teaching our not-so-good-readers to do.

I had the pleasure of hearing David Pearson speak at a conference in Vancouver. I sat in the front row, clapping very loudly. (During his presentation, I wished I had a lighter with me—as at a rock concert—to shine and wave in support of his wise words.) He spoke of his research, and of implementing change in the way we need to think and teach students to read. Reading, he stated, is not simply mastering the code. Reading is both the code and meaning behind that code: teaching reading is both teaching the code and teaching students how to make the text meaningful for them. And, while many teachers make the assumption that once the code is mastered, so too is comprehension, we are now realizing that if we want our students to acquire the ability to comprehend texts, we need to balance our reading instruction to include explicit teaching both in decoding and in comprehension. The work of Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, and of Debbie Miller, much of which is based on David Pearson's research, reflects the complexity of comprehension and its being a separate, yet equally important, aspect of reading. They state, "Reading demands a two-pronged attack. It involves cracking the alphabetic code to determine the words and thinking about those words to construct meaning" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 5).

How these strategies help readers develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of text is becoming evident in many classrooms across the province. The new British Columbia Language Arts Integrated Resource Package (IRP) outlines many of these strategies within the context of reading instruction.



This graphic helps illustrate the point made by Harvey and Goudvis. The skills listed on the left are those skills essential to mastering the code, and are generally taught in the early primary grades. They are the basics of beginning reading instruction—taught in a variety of different approaches and methods, but certainly the main focus in the early primary Language Arts programs. Often the assumption is made that, once students have mastered the code (made up of the skills

listed on the right), comprehension occurs naturally. But this is true for very few students. David Pearson's research points to comprehension as a separate aspect of reading, one that requires the same amount of direct instruction and teaching time as the decoding skills. "Once thought of as a natural result of decoding plus oral language, comprehension is now viewed as a much more complex process involving knowledge, experience, thinking and teaching" (Fielding & Pearson, pp. 62–67).

In other words, if we are to help improve our students' ability to comprehend text and learn to actively construct meaning for themselves, we need to devote as much direct instructional time teaching *thinking* as we do teaching *decoding*. Considering the number of instructional minutes primary teachers spend on teaching code, that would mean significant changes in the reading programs of many teachers. Reading instruction can no longer be considered the responsibility of early primary teachers; it is the responsibility of all teachers. All teachers need to consider themselves teachers of reading, and reading instruction must continue throughout all elementary and high-school grades. If mastering the code is only one aspect of learning to read, then teaching the code is only one aspect of reading instruction. Children need to learn that reading is not simply words on a page, but what those words mean to them. Teaching how to make sense of those words is just as important as teaching how to read them.

## How the Reading Power Program Began

Several years ago, the Vancouver School Board initiated a program called the Early Literacy Project. Its aim was to support teachers and students in their goal to improve literacy in the primary grades, and it has since evolved into the Later Literacy Project that supports intermediate teachers and students. Schools involved in the project participate in professional development in early literacy, hold monthly project meetings, are given training in reading assessment and running records, and are provided with funds for classroom visits and meetings with literacy mentors, as well as funds to increase their supply of appropriate reading material for all reading levels.

In 2001, the school where I was teaching, Laura Secord Elementary, joined the Early Literacy Project. During the first year in the project, one of our goals was to choose a literacy focus for our school. After several meetings, it was decided that we would spend our first few years in the project focusing on reading, more specifically on comprehension. We had spent the previous few years focusing on phonemic awareness, but had concerns that our students were not understanding much of what they were now able to decode. My question, when a Grade 2 student proudly tells me that he just finished "reading" a Harry Potter book, is "Did you actually *read* Harry Potter, or did you *de-code* it?" It was during those early meetings and discussions on the literacy goals of our school that my thoughts turned to Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis' book, *Strategies That Work*. I reviewed the book and pulled out things that I thought could be implemented easily, adding my own ideas and my passion for children's literature. Reading Power was born.

Simplicity was my priority in developing this program. I knew how hard teachers work and how many demands are placed on us each year, so I knew that adding one more thing to the teaching plate was not going to be something everyone

"There are literally hundreds of strategies we can choose to teach our students how to become better readers. The key is, everyone on your staff chooses the same ones."

—David Pearson, from a speech at Vancouver Technical Secondary, Fall 2003

When streamlining the Profile of a Proficient Reader, I changed “synthesize” to “transform” because I felt it was simpler language for young children. Most children are familiar with a “transformer” toy that changes from one form to another. The notion of a change in thinking seemed to be to be easier to describe to a young child by using the word “transform.”

“Through language, your students learn how to become strategic thinkers, not merely strategy users.”  
—Peter Johnston, *Choice Words*

would welcome. I also knew that we, as a staff, had already been implementing many strategies from many different sources.

If I passed out the Profile of a Proficient Reader (pages 9–10) to my colleagues and said, “These are the strategies we need to be teaching our kids to help them become better readers,” it would likely be filed, and “reading” would have carried on in classrooms as before. I knew that in order for us to try something new in the classroom, it needed to be simple and practical. I looked carefully over the profile of proficient readers and decided that seven strategies were simply too many to realistically expect primary teachers to teach and apply to their reading program, so I chose five of them: connect, question, visualize, infer, and synthesize. The strategies I did not choose are in no way less important. These five were chosen simply because of a belief that they were the ones that students could best learn and that teachers could most easily implement.

The strategies you choose—whether they be from the list of strategies that make up the Profile of a Proficient Reader, from the reading powers, or from another source—and the number you choose to introduce during the course of a year are not important. What is important is that everyone on your staff makes a commitment to intentionally integrate the strategies and the “language of thinking” into their daily practice. I have found that, in many schools, these same strategies are being taught, but teachers are using slightly different language to teach them. Creating a common language across the grades in a school becomes instrumental in a child’s development as a reader. Common language, weaving through the fabric of the classrooms in a school, creates a quilt of understanding.

One caution is worth noting here. I have heard, on more than one occasion, teachers who have attended workshops and are successfully integrating Reading Power into their classrooms say, “Oh, I don’t need to do guided reading [whole-class instruction, phonics, world walls, literacy centres, writers workshop, buddy reading, or other components of a balanced literacy program] because I’m doing Reading Power.” Reading Power is *one* component of a balanced literacy program, but it should never be considered the *only* component. I like to think of Reading Power as an additional “layer” to your reading instruction; it should not be—nor do I promote it as—a separate and isolated entity. Certainly there are many ways that Reading Power might spill over into other areas, but a balanced literacy program should reflect a variety of instructional methods, content, and practices.