

# **Reading Strategies Used by Teachers whose Students Successfully Passed the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment in the State of Mississippi**

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## **Abstract**

In 2013, to improve the literacy skills of students beginning in kindergarten and extending through third grade, the Mississippi State Legislature passed the Literacy- Based Promotion Act. The law requires every school district in the state to provide a strong reading-intensive based curriculum, as well as interventions for students displaying a substantial deficiency in reading. The law also mandates that school districts deny promotion from third to fourth grade for any student whose deficiency in reading is not remediated before the end of third grade. While many students are successful and are promoted to fourth grade, a large percentage of third grade students are being retained as they cannot pass the required summative assessment.

The researchers used a qualitative case study design to identify the strategies and practices used by third grade teachers whose students passed the reading assessment and were promoted to fourth grade. Five third grade reading teachers from multiple school districts in Mississippi participated in the study. From an analysis of five interviews, five strategies emerged that were used by teachers whose students passed the assessment. These strategies correlate with reading practices and strategies used to effectively teach reading instruction.

*Keywords:* reading instruction, reading strategies, reading assessments, third grade reading

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## **Introduction**

Today, reading is a very important skill; it is the foundational skill for learning other subjects. Not only does it serve as the major foundational skill to learning, but it is also highly

correlated to academic success. Between third and fourth grade, a critical transition takes place. The premise is that in grades Pk-3 students are learning to read, and in grades 4 and above, students read to learn (Goerge, Gwynne, Lesnick, & Smithgall, 2010; Green, 1995). Students who are not reading with comprehension by the time they exit third grade are likely to be challenged to successfully master other subjects (Goerge et al., 2010; Green, 1995). For poor and minority students of color, this phenomenon is compounded as students who exit third grade unable to read with comprehension are disproportionately poor students of color. There is a 29-point gap between students from higher-and lower-income families (Center for Public Education, 2015) and a 25-point gap between minorities and non-minorities (Fiester, 2013). Consequently, students entering fourth grade unable to read with comprehension has become a national concern.

To address this critical factor, many states are seeking approaches school districts can use to address the level of reading of students who are transitioning from third grade to fourth grade. One such state is Mississippi. In 2013, the Mississippi State Legislature passed the Literacy-Based Promotion Act. The Literacy-Based Promotion Act focuses on improving literacy skills beginning in kindergarten and extending through third grade. The law requires every school district in the state to provide a strong reading-intensive based curriculum, as well as an intervention, for students displaying a substantial deficiency in reading. The law also mandates that school districts deny promotion from third grade to fourth grade for any student whose deficiency in reading is not remediated (Mississippi Center for Education Innovation, 2014).

Many students are successful and are promoted to fourth grade. However, a large percentage of third grade students are retained as they cannot pass the required assessment. The Center for Public Education, (2015) acknowledges that if children have not established basic reading skills by the end of third grade, it might seem logical to hold them back a year and, in fact, that has been common practice, though controversial. Students who are held back a year face lower achievement and poorer social-emotional outcomes than similar students who are promoted. Also, they are more likely to drop out of school (as cited in Center for Public Education, 2015).

This trend can be reversed, and the solution is clear: teach students to read with comprehension before they exit third grade (Green, 1995). Intensive remediation and teaching comprehensive strategies can reduce the number of struggling readers. To some extent, such strategies and practices are working in the state of Mississippi. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers in the state of Mississippi whose students passed the reading assessment and were promoted to fourth grade.

## **Literature Review**

### **Reading with Comprehension**

The inability to read with comprehension is a serious national problem and cannot simply be attributed to poverty, immigration, or the learning of English as a second language (Strategic Marketing and Research, 2013). Making meaning from a passage read involves decoding alphabetic symbols, drawing upon experiences, and using strategies effectively. Simply stated, it is a complex cognitive and linguistic process, and children who struggle with reading rarely if ever develop these skills and processes. During the first 3 years of school, they rarely acquire average levels of reading fluency and end up having to work harder than their peers to

develop comprehension strategies and a sufficient vocabulary (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Proficient comprehension of a text is influenced by accurate and fluent word reading skills; oral language skills (vocabulary, linguistic comprehension); and conceptual and factual knowledge (Torgesen, 2004). It also requires knowledge and skill in the use of cognitive strategies that can be used to improve comprehension or repair it when it breaks down. Finally, students must be able to reason, use inferential skills, and have interest in the task and materials being read (Torgesen, 2004).

Good readers use many forms of thinking to analyze and comprehend a text as they read. Therefore, it is important to teach beginning readers strategies for constructing meaning from text (Shanahan et al., 2010). Strategies for constructing meaning are not the same as comprehension skills typically listed in core reading programs or teaching activities. They are not the same as completing instructional activities, such as worksheets or exercises that are aimed at giving students practice with skills such as sequencing or drawing conclusions. An instructional strategy is an intentional mental action during reading that improves reading comprehension. Simply stated, it is a deliberate effort by a reader to better understand or remember what is being read (Shanahan et al., 2010). To that end, some important skills for primary students to learn are: how to activate prior knowledge, predict, raise questions, visualize, monitor, clarify, infer, summarize, and use text organization. These skills have a positive effect on comprehension when measured by standardized tests (Shanahan et al., 2010). Therefore, literacy instruction is paramount.

### **Literacy Instruction**

Literacy instruction has been defined as teaching the explicit skills of how to read and write. However, it involves using strategies and applying them to different types of texts while gaining understanding of what was read (Dell, 2014). It goes beyond the ability to read and write; literacy involves the student's ability to comprehend and apply what is read (Dell, 2014). From third grade onward, students received very little instruction in reading comprehension. Instead, teachers focus on comprehension testing. Once a reading is complete, students are often required to respond to questions based on what was read (Durkin, 1978–79; Trehearne, 2004). Several studies and meta-analyses have examined strategies and approaches that lead to successful reading instruction. Five of the most noted ones surfaced in a report by Barksdale Reading Institute (2015). In their report, they identified phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension as strategies and approaches leading to students successfully learning to read with comprehension. We discuss these five approaches and reference them with strategies and approaches used by teachers in the state of Mississippi whose students passed the third grade reading assessment.

**Phonemic awareness instruction.** First, phonemic awareness instruction is beneficial to all beginning readers. Students who lack phonemic awareness instruction are likely to face major obstacles in learning to read (Gillon, 2003). In examining research about the levels of phonological awareness that lead to phonemic awareness and the instructional techniques that support early reading skills, Gillon (2003) found that there is a clear hierarchy of phonological awareness skills, which includes (from easiest to most difficult): syllables, onset-rhyme, and phonemic awareness. Lonigan, C., Burgess, S., Anthony, J., & Barker, T. (1998) also found that a grasp of the easier levels of phonological skills appear at earlier ages than do the more difficult

phonemic awareness skills. This means that students learning to read, or students struggling with reading, may benefit from some early attention to phonological skills not yet mastered prior to teaching phonemic awareness (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015). In addition to being a key factor in beginning reading acquisition, phonological awareness (especially phonemic awareness) is a reliable predictor of reading success (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015).

**Phonics.** The second practice leading to successful reading is phonics. Phonics is very important in reading instruction. Kelly and Campbell (2008) argued that students struggle with reading because they lack phonics. These researchers contended that instruction in phonics is critical for students who are struggling to learn to read. If phonics instruction is systematically taught to students in grades K-6, they benefit (National Reading Panel, 1999) as they focus on phonemes, the smallest units in spoken syllables and words. Additionally, they are assisted in understanding that spoken words are composed of distinguishable sounds and that sounds are represented in print by symbols. Finally, they receive instruction in blending sounds and word patterns (Kelly & Campbell). Likewise, they argued that the ability to recognize sight words is another vital skill struggling readers need. Many struggling readers lack rapid word recognition, which limits their comprehension; therefore, it is important for teachers to teach common words through approaches such as Dolch sight words, matching games, and word searches (Kelly & Campbell).

The Simple View Research (Hoover & Gough, 1990), the most influential research supporting the importance of decoding instruction, proposed that strong decoding and language comprehension skills are needed to be a skilled reader. These researchers defined decoding as the ability to read nonsense words out of context, language comprehension as the ability to understand text that is read aloud, and reading comprehension as the ability to understand text read by the student. Along with numerous other studies (Catts, Adlof, & Weismer, 2006; Verhoeven & van Leeuwe, 2011; Chen & Vellutino, 1997), they have validated the basic premise that decoding is a necessary skill for reading comprehension and that linguistic strength cannot make up for poor decoding skills. These studies have clearly shown that strong decoding is a prerequisite for strong reading comprehension. It follows that early reading instruction must ensure that children learn to decode accurately (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015).

**Fluency.** Fluency is also very important to reading comprehension. The National Reading Panel (2000) defined fluency as the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression. According to the Barksdale Reading Institute, (2015), there is a strong correlation between oral reading fluency, measured as rate and accuracy, and reading comprehension. Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998) recommended that, "Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent" (p. 14). Pikulski and Chard, (2005) suggested that teachers who work with beginning readers must focus significant amounts of instructional time on basic word recognition and word analysis skills because accuracy is a fundamental component of fluency (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015).

There is value when teachers provide immediate feedback on every error, especially when students are learning to read. Immediate feedback helps students develop the critical habit of reading accurately (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015). Pany and McCoy (1988) found that third - grade students with reading disabilities (those who read 10% to 15% of words incorrectly)

significantly improved their word recognition and comprehension scores when given immediate feedback on every single error. Therefore, teachers should provide beginning readers and students struggling with accuracy daily and systematic opportunities to learn to read words accurately (Snow et al.,1998). The National Reading Panel (2000) also found that the most effective ways to develop fluency are by repeated oral readings and guided oral repeated reading. By using repeated oral readings and guided oral readings methods, regardless of students' reading levels or ages, improvements occur in a variety of reading skills (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015).

**Vocabulary.** Like the areas mentioned above, reading vocabulary is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015). Young readers usually find difficulty in comprehending a text if they do not know a lot of the words in the text (Harmer, 2005). The vocabulary of readers is key to learning to make the transition from oral to written forms. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), as a learner begins to read, the vocabulary encountered in texts is mapped onto the oral vocabulary the learner brings to the task. The reader learns to translate the (relatively) unfamiliar words in print into speech with the expectation that the speech forms will be easier to comprehend. Benefits in understanding text by applying letter-sound correspondences to printed material come about only if the target word is in the learner's oral vocabulary. When the word is not in the learner's oral vocabulary, it will not be understood when it occurs in print (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015).

**Comprehension.** The last strategy identified by the Barksdale Reading Institute is comprehension. Comprehension is very important to reading instruction. Smith and Robinson (1980) defined reading comprehension as the understanding, evaluating, and utilizing of information and ideas gained through an interaction between the reader and the author. Comprehension is the essence of reading (Durkin, 1993), and reading depends on many levels of language skills. In fact, there are many avenues to improved reading comprehension, including the previous mentioned teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, and vocabulary. These forms of instruction influence how well students comprehend text (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015).

Allington (2001) acknowledged that most readers, including struggling readers, benefit enormously when they can construct meaning that helps make the comprehension processes visible. This can happen using several different strategies, specifically through schema. Schema help students connect the reading with something they have already learned. Pardo (2004) noted that the more background knowledge a reader has to connect with a text, the more likely the reader will be able to make sense of what is being read.

Comprehension is the true meaning of reading because, without it, a reader is simply decoding words. However, by creating meaning and gaining a true understanding of the text, readers are able to retain information and use it as a foundation for other knowledge (Dell, 2014).

### **Other Effective Literacy Methods**

Other effective literacy methods used to promote the academic growth of students in primary grades are discussed in literature. They include read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading.

**Read aloud.** Read aloud is when a teacher actively engages students while reading a specific text aloud. The reading is not a simple reading of the words; it engages students in the experience, rather than postponing their involvement until after the reading. Read aloud is useful because it allows students to think more about the text without worrying about the decoding problems (Delacruz, 2013; Dell, 2014).

**Shared reading.** According to Dell (2014), shared reading is effective in helping students become independent readers. It involves the teacher and student reading together, either in guided reading groups or one-on-one. The process is a gradual release of responsibility so the teacher and student both have a part to play. The teacher and student read together and think aloud together in an effort to push the student toward independent reading.

**Guided reading.** Guided reading is when teachers arrange students in groups of three to five by their instructional level in reading and lead them through a text. It is done in a small group setting where the teacher can fully engage students and help them at their personal level. Usually, one student will read aloud while the others read silently. Students may also answer questions, decode vocabulary, and work on fluency. When students are reading, the teacher makes anecdotal notes and tracks each student's progress, as well as records what should be worked on next (Dell, 2014).

The present study validates the research on effective strategies used to teach reading as many of these strategies are used by teachers whose students are successfully passing the mandated Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment in the state of Mississippi.

### **Research Design**

The researchers used a qualitative case study design to examine the instructional reading strategies used by reading teachers to prepare their students for the Third Grade Summative Assessment. A qualitative case study design allowed participants to discuss their experiences in-depth and provide an intimate description of the reading strategies they use in their classroom. Finally, considering the research questions set forth in the study, a qualitative case study was the most appropriate approach to use.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What instructional practices and/or strategies are used by teachers in the state of Mississippi to teach reading to students who pass the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment?
2. How are students who pass the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment in the state of Mississippi prepared for the assessment by their teacher?

### **Subject Selection and Description**

The sample for the study consisted of third grade teachers from multiple schools in the state of Mississippi. Five (5) reading teachers were selected to participate in the study. The selected schools served a range of students from similar socioeconomic status and economic

groups. Each of the five (5) participants was selected from the state's website. The researchers used the website to identify schools where at least 95 % of students met the LBPA (Literacy Based Promotion Act) passing score. Building- level administrators were contacted to gain approval for the study. The researchers asked administrators about the socioeconomic status of the students who attended their school; they also asked them to identify the most effective third grade reading teacher in the school. Once approval from the principal was attained, teachers were contacted via email. The email informed teachers of the purpose and focus of the study, the risk, and the benefits to be derived from the study. The email also stated that the results were going to be completely confidential, and teachers would be given a *pseudonym*. Teachers who gave consent to participate in the study were contacted by the researchers to schedule a face-to-face interview.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected by face-to-face interviews. An in-depth face-to-face interview took place between the researchers and each of the five teachers. During the interviews, the researchers asked teachers five (5) questions about approaches and strategies they used to teach reading and prepare students for the Third Grade Summative Assessment. Each interview lasted approximately an hour. The interview protocol was developed from the literacy instructional practices appearing in the literature which are associated with teaching reading instruction and improving students' comprehension. The five questions were:

1. Which instructional practices do you frequently use during instruction to help improve students' reading skills?
2. What test-taking strategies do you use to prepare students to pass the Third Grade Summative Assessment?
3. What has been your experience with assisting students to pass the Third Grade Summative Assessment?
4. What strategies tend to be most effective in preparing students to read with comprehension?
5. What reading activities do you regularly employ during instruction to help prepare students for the Third Grade Summative Assessment?

Participant responses were audio-taped, and tapes were transcribed into a word document and coded for emergent themes. Each interview was assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers were not revealed during the analysis and write-up of findings. During the interview, each teacher identified and discussed the type of instructional strategies used to teach reading and get students ready to pass the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the five interview transcripts were analyzed to answer the research questions. According to Yin (2014), data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, testing, or recombining evidence to produce empirically based findings. The researchers followed each of these steps. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and the transcriptions were read several times. While reading each transcript, the researchers wrote notes, listed ideas, and assessed

similarities. The researchers also compared the responses describing common experiences and then combined the responses in order to discern patterns in the information. This process disclosed how each of the five teachers taught reading and the strategies and practices they used, if any, to prepare students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment.

## **Findings**

In this section, we reveal a summary of the responses of each of the five participants. Through this storyline, we trace the practices and strategies used by the participants to teach reading and to prepare students to pass the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment.

**Bianca.** Bianca (a pseudonym) had the following to say about how she teaches reading and prepares her students for the Third Grade Summative Assessment. First, I assess how my students learn best, their interests, and their individual strengths and weaknesses. Once I discover how they learn best, their interests, and their individual strengths and weakness, I implement instructional strategies to prepare them for the Third Grade Reading Assessment. I provide individualized/differentiated instruction through the use of small, flexible reading groups, literacy centers, independent reading, and scaffolding. I also read to them daily on the carpet. This builds their fluency through modeling and reading aloud. Additionally, I ask students questions related to the text and use the strategy, think-pair-share, to build their speaking and listening skills while responding to questions. Finally, I use Fryer words to help struggling readers build their vocabulary. When asked specifically what strategies she employs to prepare her students for the Third Grade Reading Assessment she stated, “I do not teach students test-taking strategies; I focus more on building students’ vocabulary and familiarizing them with the Third Grade College-and-Career Ready Standards.” She also stated, “I believe that the Third Grade College-and-Career Ready Standards help students to be successful on the Third Grade Summative Assessment.”

**Wanda.** Wanda (a pseudonym) had the following to say about how she prepares her students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. I believe in a balanced literacy approach. I use read aloud, guided reading, teacher-directed reading, word study, and writing together to meet the needs of my students. I provide teacher-directed reading instruction with the whole class. During teacher-directed instruction, instruction is provided on a particular reading comprehension strategy, and students make connections with the text using their prior knowledge. Also, in my classroom, I use guided reading groups regularly. I meet with three groups of five students daily, and while meeting with these groups, other students are working in small group settings. In these groups, they are engaged in differentiated work on their instructional levels. Also, I use Fryer words to help struggling readers build their vocabulary and comprehension. Lastly, when asked what strategies she employs to prepare her students for the Third Grade Summative Assessment, she stated, “I teach students a lot of test prep strategies, underlining key words, eliminating incorrect answer choices, going back in the text to find evidence and support, and rereading the text. I believe these instructional approaches and strategies help students perform successfully on the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment.”

**Toya.** Toya (a pseudonym) had the following to say about how she teaches reading and



prepares her students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. I use teacher-directed instruction to provide whole group instruction to students. During direct instruction, I read aloud to students and teach them test-taking strategies via reading instruction. I use read aloud activities as a regular part of the instructional day to model fluent reading for students, and to expose them to various genre. I complete at least one read aloud activity for students daily. Also, I integrate a series of test-taking lessons into the reading block to expose students to genre used in standardized testing and to prepare them for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. During these lessons, students learn and practice strategies related to locating and highlighting relevant information within text, eliminating inappropriate answer choices, and selecting correct answers. I believe all of these strategies are useful for multiple-choice style assessments.

Word study is another component of my literacy instruction. During Word Study, I provide phonics instruction addressing vocabulary and word meanings and/or grammar instruction based on students' needs. I provide word study instruction in both whole group and small group settings. Students practice these skills throughout the week as they complete assignments during literacy stations engagement, independent assignments, making words, or word games. Also, I maintain an active word wall which students frequently use during instruction. It is at the students' eye level when they are seated at their desks and is frequently used during word study times. I believe that these instructional approaches and strategies help students perform successfully on the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment.

**Shia.** Shia (a pseudonym) had the following to say about how she teaches reading and how she prepares her students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. Shared reading is a literacy component that I implement in my reading instruction daily. I use echo and choral readings as whole group activities at the beginning of the day. This is my way of engaging students in reading instruction. I also use shared readings during guided reading and other content area reading, as well as during small group instructional times. During small group, I conduct mini-lessons and word activities on students' individual levels. During whole-group, directed instruction is used. I plan lessons using both narrative and expository texts. I teach accountable talk to help them cite evidence from the text and to build their speaking and listening skills. When asked about activities she employed for struggling readers, Shia stated, "I use Fryer words and teach students word parts to help build their vocabulary. Writing is also integrated into guided reading and teacher-directed instruction, as well as during literacy station time. I use Fryer words to help struggling readers build their vocabulary." Finally, when asked what strategies she employs to prepare her students for the Third Grade Reading Assessment, she stated, "I do not teach students test-taking strategies. I believe in teaching skills and concepts. These instructional approaches will help them perform with proficiency on the Third Grade Summative Assessment."

**Emani.** Emani (a pseudonym) had the following to say about how she teaches reading and prepares her students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. I use the knowledge of my students to provide thoughtful lessons that build on their prior knowledge. I use read aloud opportunities to explicitly model reading and pre-reading behaviors (e.g., making predictions, looking at the picture, etc.), during reading behaviors, such as think aloud, and after reading behaviors (e.g., responding to what was read, sharing, etc.) Following each read aloud is a mini- lesson which involves the explicit teaching of a particular reading comprehension skill. Each mini-lesson lasts about thirty-five minutes. I also use guided-reading groups daily. During

guided-reading, I work with groups on their instructional level. While working with each group, other students are working in a small group setting completing literacy work on their instructional levels. When asked about activities she employs for struggling readers, Emani stated, "I use Fryer words to help students build their vocabulary." Finally, when asked what strategies she employed to prepare her students for the Third Grade Assessment, she stated, "I believe in teaching skills and concepts and do not focus a lot on teaching to the test. However, I teach students test-taking strategies, such as eliminating incorrect answer choices, highlighting key words, and going back in the text to underline evidence to support their answers. I believe these instructional approaches and strategies will help students perform with proficiency on the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment."

### **Discussion**

The study focused on the instructional practices and strategies used by teachers in the state of Mississippi whose students passed the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. Conducting interviews with teachers whose students successfully passed the Third Grade Summative Assessment enables the researchers to answer the two research questions.

#### **Research Question 1: What instructional practices and or strategies are used by teachers in the state of Mississippi to teach reading to students who passed the Third Grade Summative Reading Assessment?**

All five participants disclosed that instruction in phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension are important when teaching students in the primary grades. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five essential components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. All five participants reported that they used some form of the five components to teach reading to their students: 1) *Building Students' Vocabulary*; 2) *Connecting Literacy to Real-World Experiences*; 3) *Modeling through read-alouds and performing think-alouds*; 4) *Turn and Talk*; and 5) *Small-group Instruction*.

Each of the practices used to teach reading had a significant effect on the Third Grade Summative Assessment. Research conducted by the Simple View (Hoover & Gough, 1990) proposed that both strong decoding skills and strong language comprehension skills are needed to be a skilled reader. Thus, phonics skills are important in reading instruction. Likewise, vocabulary is important in preparing students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. Research conducted by Harmer (2005) found that young readers usually find it difficult to comprehend a text if they do not know a lot of words. As a result, vocabulary instruction is crucial to the comprehension processes of a skilled reader (Barksdale Reading Institute, 2015). In addition, comprehension is a main part of early literacy, and directly teaching strategies to assist in comprehension is an effective practice to help students read on grade level. According to Allington (2001), most readers, including struggling readers, benefit enormously when they can construct meaning that helps make the comprehension processes visible.

Collectively, teachers in the study reported that vocabulary instruction enhanced students learning and comprehension of texts. Emani and Bianca recounted teaching their students to read using a variety of research-based vocabulary strategies. Their favorite vocabulary strategies included teaching students word parts and how to use context clues. Shia and Wanda also shared

that vocabulary instruction is an important strategy in teaching students to read. They use Fryer words to teach their below-level students to read on grade level and enhance their vocabulary.

Bianca, Wanda, and Emani reported that incorporating real-world connections help students understand why they are learning what they are asked to learn. It is an approach that increases students' engagement in the learning process. Wanda stated, "I use technology in the classroom to help make meaningful connections with the outside world."

Toya reported that she uses read-aloud strategies to hold students' attention. She offered that students acquire and retain content knowledge and content abilities through read-aloud text instructional strategies. Bianca reported that read-aloud text is research-based, and it helps students' comprehension. Each participant offered that read-aloud is a strategy that they always utilized. They also offered that it is a strategy that can be used in the first and second grades and in other content areas to help build students' comprehension of texts.

Wanda reported that she thinks turn and talk builds students' fluency and vocabulary. Bianca reported using turn and talk as a literacy strategy to help get students to share their thinking and ideas with each other. Similarly, Toya said she believes turn and talk strategies build a stronger foundation for reading comprehension.

Four out of the five teachers use small groups daily to provide effective reading instruction to students. Emani and Wanda reported using small-group to provide instruction to students based on their readiness level. Bianca offered that she used small groups to provide reading and phonics instruction.

### **Research Question Two: How are students who pass the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment in the state of Mississippi prepared for the assessment by their teacher?**

Regarding instructional strategies used by teachers to prepare students for the assessment, four of the five participants identified several strategies that they used to prepare their students for the assessment. These strategies are consistent with the strategies identified in the literature. The five essential components of effective reading instruction and four literacy methods were identified as being successful in teaching reading. However, one participant stated that she did not use a special method. She offered that effective reading instruction was sufficient.

All five participants disclosed that they use phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies to prepare their students for the assessment. Likewise, the participants disclosed that they use read aloud, guided reading groups, shared reading, and independent reading to model fluent reading and to individualize instruction for students, as well as to build their students' comprehension. It was these processes and strategies that enable their students to perform successfully. In summary, they acknowledged that the instructional strategies and approaches they use to teach reading contributed to their students' success on the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Strategies and Practices used by the Participants to Prepare Students to Pass the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment*

Teacher	Strategies	Practices
Bianca	Read aloud Questioning Vocabulary	Assesses students interest, their strengths and weakness Individualized/differentiated instruction small, flexible reading groups Literacy centers Independent reading and scaffolding Fryer Words Thing-pair-share
Wanda	Read aloud Word study Comprehension strategies Activating prior knowledge Sight words Test-prep strategies (underlining key words, eliminating incorrect answer choices, going back in the text to find evidence and support, and rereading the text)	Balance Literacy Approach Guided reading Differentiated work Teacher direct instruction in whole group setting meet with three groups of five students daily Guided reading Working with students on their instructional levels Activating Student's Prior knowledge
Toya	Integrate test taking lessons into the reading block Read aloud Test-taking strategies (locating and highlighting relevant information within the text, eliminating inappropriate answer choices, and selecting correct answers)	Expose students to various genres Word wall Direct instruction Word study Whole group and small group setting
Shia	Accountable talk Cite evidence from the text Word study	Literacy component Shared, echo and choral readings Mini-lesson and word activities individualized students' work levels Build students speaking and listening skills Fryer words Integrate writing Guided reading Whole group activities Engages students in the reading Teacher directed instruction Teach skills and concepts
Emani	Activate prior knowledge Read aloud Test-taking strategies	Assess the knowledge of her students Read aloud Think aloud Guided reading Modeling pre-reading behaviors (e.g., making predictions, looking at the picture, etc.) Modeling during reading behaviors Modeling after reading behaviors (e.g., responding to what was read, sharing, etc.) Working with guided reading groups daily on students' instructional levels Fryer words

## Conclusion

Our data indicated that five strategies and practices are effective in teaching reading and preparing students for the Third Grade Reading Summative Assessment. They are: a) building students' vocabulary; (b) connecting literacy to real-world experiences; (c) modeling through read-aloud and performing think-alouds; (d) turn and talk; and (e) small group instruction.

All participants in the study reported using four of these strategies, Building Students' Vocabulary; Connecting Literacy to Real-World Experiences; Modeling through Read-Alouds and Performing Think-Alouds; and Small Group Instruction. Of these four strategies, teaching vocabulary was reported as being imperative in preparing students for the Third Grade Summative Reading Assessment. Additionally, participants reported that there are benefits in connecting literacy instruction to real-world experiences as this strategy motivated their students. Two of the participants used the strategy turn and talk daily.

Overall, these findings highlight that there are strategies that are effective in teaching students to read. The approaches used by teachers in the study were student-centered. They assessed the needs of each student and used a variety of strategies and approaches to address those needs. It is also important to note that none of the participants in the study depended on one particular strategy to prepare students for success. However, in one method or another, vocabulary instruction was clearly evident in a variety of ways. In addition, connecting instruction to real world experiences had meaning. Read aloud was also meaningful.

Results of this study suggest that if an assessment is put in place at the end of third grade, teachers can find strategies that can be used to assist students in passing that assessment. When this occurs, students can move into grade four ready to learn, rather than struggling for the remainder of their schooling.

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