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Research Basis & Effectiveness

Becoming a Better Student Series

- **Becoming a Better Reader®**
- **Becoming a Better Test Taker: Reading®**
- **Becoming a Better Writer®**

Guided Instruction for Reading Comprehension & Writing

The definition of literacy is evolving and changing; influenced by the current trends in communication. It is evident that there are different modes of communication that now redefine the way students read, write, and communicate. "To become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in new literacies. Thus, educators have a responsibility to integrate reading instruction with writing. Such changes have important implications for instruction and assessment." (<https://www.literacyworldwide.org>).

With the increase in information presented in a multitude of media platforms, students must make meaning out of more and more complex texts. (Rouet, 2006) In addition, there are key shifts in student expectations for college and career readiness, so students need to build content-area knowledge with a wide variety of both informational and literary texts to master reading and writing. Classroom administered performance tasks (e.g., note-taking, research papers, science investigations, mathematical solutions, writing samples, and oral presentations) require students to improve opportunities within learning. Questions and tasks demand careful comprehension (of subjects). (Kist, 2018).

Students who are good at monitoring their comprehension know when they understand what they are reading and know when they do not understand. Research shows that when students receive targeted instruction, it can help them monitor their comprehension. Good readers use metacognitive strategies to think about what they are reading. During reading, students might monitor their understanding and check their understanding. Teachers should monitor their students throughout the comprehension instructional process and provide strategies that include:

- Identifying where reading difficulty occurs and remediate.
- Having students restate difficult sentences or passages in their own words.
- Looking back through text to build a deeper understanding.
- Looking forward in the text for information that might help to resolve the difficulty.
- Taking notes while they read to improve comprehension and writing.

Guiding questions can also help students become more effective readers and writers because they:

- Give students a purpose for reading by asking before-, during-, and after-reading strategies.
- Focus student attention on what they are learning.
- Help students think actively as they read.
- Encourage students to monitor their comprehension.
- Help students review content and relate it to what they might already know and have learned.
- Improve writing by requiring students to read and re-read passages to write evidence-based responses.

In using guided questions, “the question-answer relationship strategy” encourages student to learn how to understand what is being asked and how to better answer the question. Students should indicate whether the information they used to answer questions was textually explicit information (siting directly from the text), textually implicit information (information that was implied from the text), or information that is entirely taken from the students’ own background knowledge. By generating questions using these strategies, students become aware whether they can answer the questions and if they understand what they are reading. Students eventually learn to ask themselves questions while reading to improve comprehension – this process helps them gain information from different segments of the text. For example, students can be taught to ask main idea questions that relate to important information in the text and ask inferential questions, which requires critical thinking.

Becoming a Better Reader®, *Becoming a Better Test Taker: Reading®*, and *Becoming a Better Writer®* provide a unique instructional approach to help students build critical thinking skills, reading comprehension, and writing skills.

Each page, in each series, focuses on specific reading comprehension skills, test-taking, and writing strategies. The unique format for each page is divided into a two-column format. The reading passages and complex questions are on the left side of the page with instructional strategies and guides on the right side in blue columns. The instructional strategies and guides help students improve their thinking processes while reading and writing to build a deeper understanding within the text. Complex questions use a flexible range of metacognitive reading skills by standard to reinforce the skills taught. The instructional guides also identify the type of question being asked to help students master the standards.

Becoming a Better Reader® is designed to improve reading comprehension. Informational and literary selections use *Before-Reading*, *During-Reading*, and *After-Reading* strategies with complex questions by standard.

Becoming a Better Test Taker: Reading® uses guided questions with strategies specifically to improve test-taking strategies. This series also uses the *Before-Reading*, *During-Reading*, and *After-Reading* strategies by standard. The passages contain both informational and literary selections.

Becoming a Better Writer® focuses on improving writing skills. Instruction and guided questions cover the mechanics of writing, grammar, paragraph structure, and essays. Part 1 focuses on the mechanics of grammar, Part 2 focuses on essay writing, and Part 3 is independent practice.

EVIDENCE-BASED EFFECTIVENESS

Several large urban and suburban districts from NY to Florida to Texas have implemented the *Becoming a Better Student* series. What started as smaller purchase orders by school have become district-wide initiatives used in a variety of ways. Below are a few examples of use and effectiveness:

- Upstate NY – a suburban district implemented the series with every elementary and middle school for whole class instruction. RALLY! Education® created customized pacing calendars for the block of time (several sessions each week throughout the school year). This district has seen a 12% improvement in their reading comprehension scores.
- NYC DOE – this large urban district has had many public and charter schools purchase the *Becoming a Better Student* series. The use varies from school to school – some of the schools use the product as whole class instruction while others use it for small group remediation/intervention along with before- and after-school tutoring. They have purchased this series over several years and continue to see student improvement.
- Florida – several large schools within major school systems have purchased this series. It is being used in a variety of ways including ESOL, small group remediation and intervention along with before- and after-school tutoring. These schools have also seen improvement in reading scores since the pandemic.
- Texas – several districts and schools have also purchased this series. Some of the areas are more remote with a shortage of teachers and tutoring support. They implemented the series for intervention, tutoring, and remedial programs – the series is also helpful for their new teachers. The guided instruction provides step-by-step instruction with little prep time. These areas continue to purchase the products and have seen 3-5% gains.

REFERENCES

<https://www.literacyworldwide.org>. (2019). What's Hot in Literacy.

Kist, William (2018). *New Literacies and the New Standards*. Educational Leadership.

Rouet, J.F. (2006). The skills of document use: From text comprehension to web-based learning.