Shanahan on Literacy

**Friday, June 22, 2012**

**[We Zigged When We Should Have Zagged](http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2012/06/we-zigged-when-we-should-have-zagged.html)**

I’ve been fielding a lot of complaints recently about the lack of comprehension strategies in the common core state standards. And, in fact, no reading comprehension strategies are included in the common core. I’m asked how that can be if comprehension strategies are research-based? If the common core is aimed at making students better readers, how can they leave out instructional approaches proven to advantage students?

The fact is the National Reading Panel concluded that teaching reading comprehension strategies was beneficial. Later, the What Works Clearinghouse allowed a group that I chaired to recommend the teaching of reading comprehension strategies to K-3 readers—and they rated that recommendation as being based on strong research evidence. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/readingcomp_pg_092810.pdf>

Why would the common core neglect this evidence? The reason that these strategies were not included in the standards is because the standards are learning goals. That is, they are the learning outcomes that we are striving to for students to accomplish. Strategies are not an outcome. Neither the PARRC or Smarter Balanced tests will test students’ knowledge of strategies; they will test ability to read and interpret text.

That makes sense to me (though it is somewhat inconsistent with the common core stance on “close reading,” certainly a method for teaching students to read text in particular ways). But it is a peculiar situation: For years, we have taught students to read with relatively easy texts and have taught reading comprehension strategies. This is puzzling since the purpose of strategies is to help you to make sense of a text that challenges your linguistic skills – in other words, strategies help you to read hard text, not easy text.

Now we are pivoting to teaching reading with challenging text, right at the point where strategies are being made optional (you can teach them if they help students to read better). We zigged when we should have zagged.

I have no problem with strategies being omitted from the standards – they are not outcomes, but tools. But they are tools that I would definitely include in my teaching regimen, particularly when dealing with challenging text.