

## *Book Review / Recension*

JoAnne Schudt Caldwell. (2008). *Comprehension Assessment: A Classroom Guide*. New York: The Guilford Press. (230 pages). ISBN: 978-1-59385-707-3

Joanne MacNevin, E.A.L. Itinerant Teacher, PEI Department of Education

In *Comprehension Assessment: A Classroom Guide*, JoAnne Schudt Caldwell discusses useful strategies for measuring comprehension that can be applied directly to the classroom, as well as factual information that could prove beneficial to teachers interested in conducting authentic comprehension assessment. The book, which begins by clarifying what comprehending entails, includes an array of information on the comprehension process, methods of how teachers can help students strengthen their comprehension abilities, and various approaches teachers can use to accurately measure their students' level of comprehension. The difficulties and subtleties of trying to understand comprehension are dealt with in reference to reading, writing, and viewing. The author, who outlines strategies both that have been used in the past, and those that are currently in use in classrooms across the United States, offers a comparison of these strategies as well as information – accompanied by current research – as to which methodologies would be most beneficial.

In her preface, Caldwell claims this is “a book for busy teachers,” an accurate description because the information in the book is organized in an easily accessible manner. At the beginning of each chapter, she lists exactly what information can be found, as well as page numbers for each specific piece of information. These lists, which serve as an extension of the table of contents, allow readers to easily find exactly what they are looking for without having to sift through the whole chapter. She also

organizes the information within the chapters in an easily accessible manner, with important information highlighted in text boxes or charts. Where appropriate, she has provided for readers concrete examples to enhance understanding. In chapter four, for example, Caldwell explains and compares different categories of questions for comprehension assessment that five different researchers used. She then follows this explanation and comparison with a chart that highlights her explanation and allows readers a simplified visual to further analyze and synthesize the expressed ideas. In chapter six, the author has provided a chart list of types of questions that teachers could easily use to assess comprehension of both narrative and expository material.

Several chapters also include activities teachers can do as they read. These activities provide teachers with a chance to apply the knowledge they are gaining as they read as well as assess their own comprehension of the material. In a way, these activities help foster a degree of higher-level thinking and allow the reader a chance to interact with the material. In chapter four, for instance, the author provides an excerpt from a student textbook and a set of questions from the text. The reader is asked to read these questions, and label them: literal, application inference, or text inference. The answers are explained following the labelling activity, although Caldwell encourages readers not to read the answers until they have tried to label the questions on their own. Another instance of the semi-interactive activities presents itself in chapter eight as part of a discussion regarding the effectiveness of cloze sentence activities as tools in comprehension assessment. This activity invites readers to complete different cloze sentence exercises, determine their own scores, and then decide whether or not this strategy is an effective way to assess comprehension, using their experiences with the cloze sentences coupled with the author's points surrounding the activity.

The book continues to prove its usefulness to busy teachers by providing a brief, bulleted summary at the end of each chapter. These end-of-chapter summaries are useful shortcuts and/or concise reminders of the ideas discussed in the chapter. Also at the end of each chapter, following the summary, Caldwell provides short lists of professional development activities that allow teachers to reflect upon and apply the information and points in the chapter. These lists, which provide readers

with the opportunity to strengthen their own comprehension, exemplifies one of the author's points: that learning requires both sound comprehension and application of the new, remembered knowledge.

As an English Additional Language teacher, I was glad to see the discussion in Chapter 8 regarding the relationship between fluency and comprehension. There are students I work with who demonstrate decoding skills at or above grade level, and who do well on fluency assessments, but who are unable to comprehend what they are reading. Chapter 8 brings this issue to the forefront as part of a brief discussion. I would have appreciated more time spent on this issue; however the discussion does provide some useful information and strategies for teachers.

Chapter 7 also has techniques and ideas that could be used by English Additional Language teachers as well as other teachers who are interested in helping their students build vocabulary, thereby increasing their comprehension of more difficult texts. This chapter goes right to the root of what is necessary to understand a text: individual word comprehension. The author touches upon the dilemma of deciding which words should be used in a word comprehension assessment, and provides methodologies for teachers to determine whether or not students comprehend the vocabulary words. There is even an easily accessible text box with a list of resources should teachers be interested in further reading on the topic of word comprehension. Chapter 7 was probably the chapter I found most useful, as many of the strategies work very well with students who are learning a new language.

In conclusion, I think this book would prove useful to busy teachers. It is especially useful for teachers who are interested in helping their students increase their levels of comprehension. It also provides methods for most effectively measuring the students' comprehension. I would recommend this book as a comprehensive resource to busy teachers.