Section 1: Chapter 5

Research-Tested Comprehension Strategies With a Texas Twist

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Abstract

Three research-based and time honored strategies-- Question Answer Relationships (QAR), Question the Author (QtA), and Reciprocal Teaching (RT)—were matched to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to determine if the use of those instructional routines would address the new, more rigorous standards. Specifically, Grade 4 TEKS for Reading were used as representative of the intermediate grades. A chart was presented to outline how the key elements of the instructional strategy would address the selected TEKS for vocabulary development and informational text requirements . Several instructional suggestions, referred to as the Texas Twist, were presented to increase the usefulness of the strategy for the current standards shifts. It was shown that the selected strategies would indeed meet many of the standards. Teachers could utilize these strategies (with Texas Twists) with confidence for addressing rigorous comprehension requirements.

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Literacy instruction reflects a rich history of changes and challenges; and with each major challenge, a stage of discovery occurs. Faced with new changes in state testing, literacy educators are once again seeking answers for what really works to meet increased rigor in assessment practices. From other historical challenges, teachers ruggedly retained what they intuitively knew worked with students and managed to morph into even stronger and more powerful instructors as one major change replaced another. What might teachers learn from the new challenges?

The recent changes outlined in the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) (TEA, 2009) and the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (TEA, revised August 2013) challenge

Texas educators to even higher literacy goals and standards than years past. At the same time, states across the nation are embracing a related set of high expectations through the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS, 2014). Some of the shared shifts include an increased emphasis on informational reading, deeper and closer processing of complex text (literary and informational), and a commensurate understanding of key academic vocabulary (Alberti, 2012/2013, 25-26).

Each of these shifts present possibilities for significant positive impact, but how do such shifts change teachers' day-to-day instruction? What practices need to change and what can be kept with adaptation? Certainly, it is not wise to overturn everything professionals have supported in the path leading up to this, more rigorous, journey.

What Instructional Strategies Should be Kept or Adapted?

Researchers and supporting professional developers appear eager to catch up (if catching up is possible) with educators' needs. Meanwhile, teachers are faced with day-to-day and moment-by-moment instructional decisions. In times of less certainty, teachers and administrators often fall prey to questionable sources and practices such as staying with unfounded teacher lore, selecting inadequate curriculum, or taking an unbalanced teach-to-the-test approach. Without belaboring those common pitfalls, this article outlines a few instructional practices that are research-tested and time-honored, and poses that instructional routines may be incorporated into daily instructional practices to meet rigorous standards. The author presents "Texas Twists," or suggestions and modifications, for teacher use along with tables that match these practices to TEKS requirements.

Three instructional routines were selected for analysis in this article based on specific criteria: a) positive research results, b) longevity as accepted practice, c) level of support for a broad set of comprehension skills, d) usefulness for differing grade levels with diverse student populations, and e) lessons with high student engagement.

1. Question-Answer-Relationships (QAR) (Raphael, 1982, Raphael & Au, 2005)
2. Question-the-Author (QTA) (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2006)
3. Reciprocal Teaching (RT) as originally researched by Palincsar in the mid-1980 and more recently adapted by Oczkus (2010)

The three selected strategies have demonstrated effectiveness with both literary and informational text, but only the informational TEKS were used for this analysis due to the increased emphasis on this skill. Note that the scope of this article cannot do justice to the full use of the selected routines, so teachers are encouraged to examine professional resources to fully implement the strategies. Finally, each routine requires careful scaffolding to transfer expertise from teacher to individual student processing, which is the ultimate goal for classroom integration.

Using the intermediate grades 3-5 as the focus of review and Grade 4 TEKS as representative, each of the selected routines were analyzed and matched as shown in Tables 3 and 4 for the following TEKS categories:

- Vocabulary Development (Table 3)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Culture and History (Table 4)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Expository Text (Table 4)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Persuasive Text (Table 4)
- Comprehension of Informational Text/Procedural Text (Table 4)

Question-Answer Relationships (QAR)

The QAR is a strategy which enables students to examine comprehension questions in order to determine how the question might be answered. Students are taught to use the type of question in relation to the respective answer as a tool in comprehension development (Raphael, 1982). In 2005, Raphael and Au reported the QAR as a useful tool to support test-taking strategies on state and national assessments. In a more recent text, Raphael, Highfield, and Au (2006) drew on repeated research to further support instruction on the relationship among the question, the text content, and reader. Such knowledge puts this powerful tool in the hands of students and increases comprehension.

In early grades, the QAR routine begins with two major categories *In the Book* and *In My Head* shown in Table 1, first row or heading. Clipart or pictures and hand motions are often used to support student memory of question and answer relationships. Charts with these images and descriptions are then used throughout the school year.

More advanced students discriminate between answers that are stated directly in the text as *Right There* and those answers in more than one point in the text as *Think and Search*. For questions that require inference, students use evidence *In the Book,* in combination with *In My Head*, for *Author and Me*. Those answers that refer to text but rely on an individual's experiences are called *On My Own*. See Table 1, second row. The third row of Table 1 provides an example of the type of question or vocabulary associated with the headings.

Table 1

Instructional Language for Question and Answer Relationships (QAR)

In the Book		In My Head	
Right There	**Think & Search**	**Author & Me**	**On My Own**
The answer is in the text, "right there" in the same sentence.	Readers search in more than one location and put together the parts to answer.	Readers use the text and their own ideas to answer the question.	The answers reflect the text but the readers' own ideas and experiences are primary.
Example Vocabulary	**Example Vocabulary**	**Example Vocabulary**	**Example Vocabulary**
Who *When* *What* *Where* *Name* *Describe* *Identify*	*What things are alike* *Distinguish between* *Compare* *Reconstruct* *Explore* *Consolidate* *Summarize*	*How could* *Create* *Design* *Infer* *What is implied* *Interpret* *Find implicit clues*	*Give your opinion* *Defend your position* *What would happen if* *Judge the facts* *Suppose* *Why* *Will it work if*

Texas Twist 1 (QAR). The TEKS refer to *explicit* and *implied* text evidence and *stated* as opposed to *implied* author's purpose. Teachers may use teacher library resources or Internet sites like ReadingQuest (n.d.) throughout the year and pair the TEKS terms with the student-friendly QAR vocabulary. Some sample questions for teachers are presented below:

- "*When you found your answer, was the text evidence explicit (Right There)?*"
- "*If the answer was not directly in the text, was it implied?*

Texas Twist 2 (QAR). Teachers should consider adding to the *Think and Search* label to make it "Think, Search, *and FIND,*" thus providing an extra emphasis on completion.

Texas Twist 3 (QAR). Especially because the TEKS (and resulting tests) emphasize text-based questions and answers, it is important to use *On My Own* QARs with caution. Though making personal connections with the text is important and leads to valued follow-up writing tasks, readers may get off track. Students need to beware that open connections are not a "launching point for musing" which may do "little to enhance a student's understanding of the text itself" (Boyles, 2012/2013, p. 37).

Question the Author (QtA)

Essentially, QtA (Beck & McKeown, 1996, 2006) is a strategy that engages students actively with a text, encouraging them to ask questions or deeper queries of the author. Using queries, or open-ended prompts, to consider the text, in combination with teacher-facilitated discussion, students are drawn to greater elaboration and collaboration toward building meaning from what they are reading. Beck and McKeown (2006) remind professionals that the point of QtA is "to get students to consider an author's ideas and, if necessary, to challenge the author's words or organization of ideas in an effort to deduce the intended meaning" (p. 32). This shifts power to students who are reading and interpreting while analyzing and evaluating an authors' ability to deliver that meaning. Students learn to ask questions such as the following:

- "*What is the author's purpose?*"
- "*What is the author trying to say?*"
- "*Why do you think the author used the following phrase?*"

Texas Twist 4 (QtA). QtA techniques are close to what many Texas teachers do already, i.e. ask multiple questions about the author's purpose. This Texas Twist, however, suggests that teachers use the specific words *stated* and *implied* as in the TEKS.

- *"Can you find where the author states his or her purpose?" "If so, the stated purpose is 'Right There'."*
- *"Does the author state their purpose in more than one place?" "If so, you need to Think, Search, and Find the answer."*
- *"If the answer is not stated directly (i.e. if you can't find it Right There) then the purpose is implied." "For implied purpose, use Author and Me."*

Texas Twist 5 (QtA). Teachers are encouraged to broaden the scope of QtA queries to include expository text features and organization such as in the following examples:

- *"How does the author's choice of headings support you as a reader?"*
- *"How does the use of illustration support the author's purpose?"*
- *"Why did the author present that image in his/her persuasive text?"*
- *"How did the _____ structure support your understanding?"*

Texas Twist 6 (QtA). QtA queries can also address most of the vocabulary-oriented TEKS including word derivation, context, analogies, and common idioms:

- *"Why do you think the author chose this word?"*
- *"The word origin is _____, how does that relate to the author's message?"*
- *"What other vocabulary could the author have chosen?"*
- *"How would _____ have changed the meaning?"*

Texas Twist 7 (QtA). Teacher-facilitated queries support TEKS requirements that our students understand different types of texts, such as cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts as well as persuasive and procedural texts:

- *"How does the author reflect the _____ culture?"*
- *"What techniques does the author using to persuade you?"*

Reciprocal Teaching (RT)

Few instructional routines meet rigorous standards as does Reciprocal Teaching (RT). With years

of successful practice and research-results, RT provides a framework for using four valued

comprehension strategies--predicting, questioning, monitoring, and summarizing—to bring meaning to a

text and to monitor thinking and learning (Palincsar & Brown, 1986). The reciprocity in RT is an

essential feature in which the students take turns being the teacher. Through modeling and other

scaffolds, the teacher releases the strategies to the students to gain meaning. In its essence, teachers

facilitate students' use of these strategies by use of stems such as the examples shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Instructional Language for Reciprocal Teaching (RT)

Predicting	Questioning	Clarifying	Summarizing
Suppose…. *I think I will learn….*	*I wonder….* *Who…? What…?* *When…? Where…?* *Why…?* *How does….?*	*I did not understand the part where….* *I need to know more about….* *I think the author is saying….because….*	*The important ideas in what I read were….* *This is mostly about….* *In combining the ideas, I see …..* *Overall, I learned...*

Oczkus (2010) expands RT instructional opportunities to include "in-class guided reading groups,

after-school and in-class interventions, and pull-out program" (p. 134). She also illustrates how RT can

be used in whole class sessions, in literature circles, and with the Internet. As shown in Table 3, the RT

strategies for clarifying vocabulary is useful for addressing TEKS vocabulary skills, including a) word

derivation, b) analogies, c) common Idioms, and d) dictionary/glossary skills. Students are encouraged to

provide evidence of what they tried, e.g. context clues, origin, meaningful roots, affixes, and so on.

Texas Twist 8 (RT). Similar to the instructional caution for QAR On-My-Own responses, the predicting strategies for RT should not become an opportunity for random musings or projections that distract from the text or author's purpose. Especially for practical TEKS purposes, a prediction should remain focused on text or topic. Requesting students to make predictions is a common practice, but this Twist reminds teachers to forgo predicting before students have adequate clues (or build background knowledge) so that students can make valuable predictions about what is going to be read and reduce guessing that may distract from the text or discussion.

Texas Twist 9 (RT). The original four RT strategies (predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing) are not comprehensive enough to meet the current rigorous demands on students. Teachers can consider using the RT routine and add some of the following to interactive think aloud lessons. See Oczkus (2009) for other ideas and suggestions:

- Evaluating
- Inferring
- Monitoring
- Visualizing

Texas Twist 10 (RT). Oczkus (2009, 2010) and other reading professionals have incorporated visuals and even hand-signals that have been effective especially for English as Second Language Learners (ESL) and other struggling readers. Texas teachers can use their own twist as needed, using images that are close to student lives, such as football, other sports, and more.

Looking at QAR, QtA, and RT Together

The three selected routines (QAR, QtA, and RT) are a few research-validated and long standing comprehension practices that address Texas teacher instructional needs for close reading in content areas with commensurate academic vocabulary. Teachers can use Table 3 for Vocabulary and Table 4 for Informational Text analysis to document that planning for good comprehension routines directly relate to the TEKS.

As demonstrated in Tables 3 and 4, QAR, QtA, and RT work together across multiple text and styles. Once the routines are established, the teacher and students can use them often in multiple settings throughout the day and over the academic year. If the routines are taught early in the year, they will serve as a time-savers as teachers help their scholars explore new information. As teachers introduce new information, they can use the familiar routines so that there is less cognitive load and more carry over from one strategy or text type to another.

Table 3

Examples of How the Three Strategies Relate to the Vocabulary TEKS

TEKS Vocabulary Requirements	QAR	QtA	RT
Vocabulary:	**Use QAR to address Context Clues:**	**Use QtA for each a), b), c), d) , or e) as per teacher plan and design:**	**Use RT's Clarifying strategies to approach: a), b), c), d), and e) as per teacher plan and design:**
a) Word derivation b) Context clues c) Analogies d) Common Idioms e) Dictionary/Glossary	• *Right There*—Clues are before or after the word • *Think and Search*—Clues are in more than one location • *Author and Me*—Clues must be inferred • *On My Own*—Schema clues confirmed by text	• Why did the author choose this word? • Why not another word? • How does the meaning change?	• Identify a difficult word, sentence, or part. • How did you figure it out? • What strategies did you try?

Table 4

How the Three Strategies Relate to Informational Text Requirements in TEKS

TEKS for Informational Text	QAR	QtA	RT
Culture and History Analyze, make inferences, & draw conclusions about the *author's purpose…* • Provide text evidence • Explain difference between stated and implied purpose	**Relate visual QAR terms for author's purpose:** • If the QAR is *Right There*, then the purpose is stated. • If the QAR is *Author and Me*, the purpose is implied.	**Sponsor inquiry:** • How does the author indicate his/her purpose? (See also QAR.) • How does _____ represent a culture or historical perspective?	**Students use:** • Clarify—"*When the author says ____ , it means _____.*" • Question— "*I'm wondering if ….*" • Summarize—"*Overall, the text is saying….*"
Expository Text Analyze, make inferences, & draw conclusions about *expository text* • Provide text evidence • Summarize main idea + detail • Distinguish fact from opinion • Describe explicit and implicit ideas and content relationships • Use multiple text features	**Apply QAR to address TEKS c) and d):** • Contrast explicit (*Right There*) & implicit (*Author & Me)* ideas. • Text features (like charts) offer *Right There* data. • Other feature questions require *Think and Search* e.g. compare and contrast.w or *Author and Me,* e.g. "*Why does….*"	**Analyze how author's purpose influences organization:** • Main idea + detail • Fact vs opinion • Explicit vs implied/implicit relationships • Students inquire "*How does the author use headings & other features?*" • "*When the author does…., then it means ….*"	**Students use:** • Predict—"*From this heading, I believe this section will tell me…*" "*Next, I think I will learn…*" • Clarify—"*I'm thinking nocturnal means…. because….*" • Question— "*I'm wondering if ….*" • Summarize—"*In this section, I learned….*"

TEKS for Informational Text	QAR	QtA	RT
Persuasive Text Analyze, make inferences, & draw conclusions about *persuasive text*… • Provide text evidence • Explain how author uses language and presentation to influence reader	**Use a variety of QARs:** • Right There: *Where is it that the author states his/her opinion?* • Think & Search: *In how many ways did the author illustrate the positive effect of _____?*	**Analyze why author chose different persuasive techniques, such as:** *bandwagon, beautiful people, association,* and so on. • *"The author wants to persuade me because…."*	**Students use:** • Predict—*"Next, I think the author will tell me…"* • Question— *"What does it mean when it says…?"* • Summarize—*"This text suggests…"*
Procedural Text Glean and use information in *procedural* text • Determine sequence • Explain factual information presented graphically (e.g. charts, diagrams, graphs, illustrations)	**Procedural text mainly sponsors in-the-text QARs**: • *Right There,* e.g. "Find…" "When did…?" • *Think and Search,* e.g. "How are ____ alike or different…?" "Compare____ and ____."*	**Analyze how the procedural text changes author's organization:** • *"Why did the author include the steps to…?"* • *"Why did the author include a diagram here?"*	**Students use:** • Predict—*"Next, I think the author will tell me…"* • Clarify—*"The diagram clarifies how to…." "I need to know what ____ means to understand."* • Summarize—*"All of these steps tell me…."*

Conclusion

Teachers can keep their lessons focused on deeper and richer comprehension experiences for their students as with QAR, QtA, and RT and ensure that TEKS are being met. Tables in this article illustrate how a teacher can address specific TEKS with plans for QAR, QtA, and RT. Especially because research and information on the use of these routines is far greater than the scope of this article, teachers are encouraged to check the internet (or published texts) for even more research, practical suggestions, charts, cards, and specific student examples.

This article illustrated a few research-based routines and strategies to address specific challenges in developing comprehension. The Texas Twists suggest continuous adaptations and modifications to tried and true comprehension instructional strategies in order to meet new requirements. No longer does any single (or two or three) guided reading strategy or routine provide adequate foundation for increased rigorous reading requirements. Teachers and their students need a vast set of comprehension techniques and strategies used in various combinations to extend students' growth and literacy achievement.

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