Strategic readers can be strategic inquirers. “The degree to which students can read and understand text in all formats (e.g., picture, video, print) and all contexts is a key indicator of success in school and in life” (AASL 2007, 2). Simply put, if students are unable to make sense of text, they cannot be successful inquirers. School librarians can help students develop their reading proficiency by aligning selected reading strategies with specific phases of the inquiry process. Educators who explicitly and simultaneously teach both processes help students succeed.

Do your lesson plan learning objectives include reading comprehension as well as inquiry learning outcomes? Research indicates that many students strive to reach deep comprehension of the texts they read (Biancarosa and Snow 2006; Brozo and Simpson 2007). Today’s state standards, including the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), emphasize topical informational texts and literary nonfiction, such as essays, speeches, biographies, and autobiographies, as well as fictional texts. Standards also require students to read in all content areas, engage with increasingly complex texts that are beyond their proficient reading level, and cite evidence from texts to support their interpretations. The fact that there is a national focus on improving students’ reading skills is an invitation to school librarians to become key leaders in our schools’ comprehensive literacy improvement efforts.

While library literature is strong with support for helping school librarians become better facilitators of inquiry learning, fewer resources are available to help us improve our practice in teaching reading comprehension in the school library setting. As long-time reading promoters, some school librarians may not see the need for strengthening their proficiency.
in teaching reading strategies. However, by taking the perspective that reading and inquiry go hand in hand school librarians can increase the impact of their work by explicitly teaching these strategies in tandem.

**Strategic Teaching**

Inquiry learning includes a set of skills to be learned and practiced. These skills align with those that classroom teachers teach and students learn in English language arts and other content areas. As figure 1 indicates, educators can align inquiry phases with reading comprehension strategies to strengthen students’ foundational reading skills while they are engaged in inquiry learning. Through coteaching, classroom teachers and school librarians have the perfect opportunity to combine these interconnected strategies to improve student achievement. By including reading comprehension standards in inquiry lesson learning objectives and intentionally modeling, monitoring, and assessing these strategies throughout the inquiry process, educators can help learners practice deep comprehension as they learn how to learn.

Figure 1 shows one of the components on the “School Librarians Take a Starring Role in the Common Core State Standards: Be a Star in Reading Comprehension” infographic (<www.al.org/aasl/sites/al.org-aasl/files/content/aaslissues/toolkits/Reading_Infographic_Final.pdf>). Developed as part of AASL’s Common Core State Standards Implementation Assistance Toolkit, this infographic provides school librarians with many possibilities for taking a leadership role in supporting students in strategic reading across the curriculum.

School librarians’ use of the language of reading and language arts in lesson objectives while modeling, monitoring, and assessing outcomes helps students by providing them with instruction delivered with a consistent academic vocabulary. This use of consistent terminology also helps school librarians demonstrate precisely how our teaching is aligned with student learning standards. This consistency also benefits classroom teachers who may need to see the connections between their teaching responsibilities and what they can gain by coteaching with their school librarian.

**Activating or Building Background Knowledge**

In the opening phases of the inquiry process, educators support learners’ success by activating or building their background knowledge. When we immerse learners in ideas and information and invite them to make connections, we encourage them to be curious as they connect with what they already know about a topic. When we ask students to complete the “K” section of a K-W-L chart, we are helping them activate...
their background knowledge and build upon it. When we immerse students in information, we frontload their engagement with a topic, motivate them, and build background knowledge on which they can construct new information. Depending on the inquiry process, the phases before students develop their own questions are designed to activate or build their background knowledge.

**Questioning, Making Predictions, and Drawing Inferences**

Questioning is at the heart of inquiry. Student-developed researchable questions are essential to inquiry learning. Ideally, students’ questions evolve and deepen throughout the inquiry process. Engaging in questioning as a reading comprehension strategy is one way to help learners stay focused on their questions or discover the need to change them. Questioning for comprehension involves readers in questioning the author and the text, searching for bias and point of view, and determining validity. This focus on questioning can help readers learn more about what it means to ask meaningful questions.

When readers combine their background knowledge with clues in the text, they are able to make logical predictions or draw defensible inferences. Making predictions propels a reader through the text and keeps her engaged and posing questions to determine whether or not her predictions were correct. A reader who draws inferences is engaged in deep comprehension because she is reading between the lines and searching for deeper meaning. Oftentimes, a learner’s interpretations are based on the inferences drawn from deeply reading various texts, wrestling with conflicting information, and arriving at her own conclusions.

**Determining Main Ideas**

Main ideas are always dependent on the reader’s purpose for reading. When we teach students to make notes, we are asking them to determine importance, a reading comprehension strategy, and to distinguish main ideas from supporting details. Sifting through information from multiple sources or dealing with conflicting information is part and parcel of inquiry learning. Note-making and citing evidence from texts are essential if students are to support their interpretations and conclusions with text-based answers.

School librarians need to know multiple strategies for teaching note-making. The “trash-’n’-treasure” note-making method is one option (Jansen 2007); it begins with skimming for keywords related to the learner’s inquiry question. Deletion-substitution is another method (Moreillon 2012, 121–22; Moreillon 2013a, 106–8). After reading a chunk of text, a learner deletes (crosses out) words, phrases, or whole sentences that are not related to his inquiry question or information he already knows. He then substitutes words or phrases to clarify vocabulary or concepts to increase his understanding. What remains is pertinent, useful information that he can use to summarize that chunk of text. By keeping his focus on the main idea (his inquiry question), the reader can identify information that is most meaningful to his inquiry.

**Synthesizing and Defining/ Redefining the Purpose for Reading**

Bringing together information from multiple and sometimes conflicting sources to create new knowledge is the ultimate goal of inquiry learning. School librarians provide students with access to resources in multiple formats, but do students know how to access information within all types of texts? By helping students develop their proficiency in applying comprehension strategies to resources in all formats, librarians increase the likelihood that learners will be able to synthesize the discrete
Building a Bridge

Educators provide graphic organizers to scaffold students’ engagement with texts throughout the inquiry process. These graphic organizers support students in making meaning from text while helping them document the new information they are learning as they engage with resources to answer inquiry questions. A matrix, developed for school librarians, that aligns the CCSS, AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, inquiry process, reading comprehension strategies, and learning applications, including graphic organizers, processes such as mind mapping, and supportive resources such as text sets, is at <www.schoollibrarymonthly.com/articles/pdf/Moreillon2013-v29n4p29.pdf> (Moreillon 2013b).

Building a bridge between reading strategy instruction and inquiry learning is important work for school librarians. Rather than presenting inquiry learning as something totally new or separate from classroom curricula, school librarians can emphasize this alignment to demonstrate how inquiry can help students improve their reading proficiency. This strategy can help position inquiry learning as an integral part of the curriculum and keep it from becoming an add-on for which time may never be available or available only at the end of the school year—after standardized tests have been completed.

As Carol Tilley has noted, “School librarians can do more than promote reading. We can accept the role as instructional partners in teaching reading and thrive in performing it” (2013, 7). The best advocacy for the work of school librarians comes from implementing dynamic, integrated, standards- and evidence-based school library programs. When we help our administrators and faculty colleagues address and begin to solve their needs for improving students’ proficiency in reading, we increase the perception that the school librarian’s work is essential for student success. When we position ourselves as coteachers of reading comprehension integrated into inquiry, we create a win-win learning environment for all!

Judi Moreillon

is an assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Studies

at Texas Woman’s University. She served as a member of the AASL Common Core State Standards Implementation Assistance Task Force that developed the toolkit found at <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/tools/toolkits/ccss-implementation>.

Works Cited:


