Florida Center for Reading Research

Making Connections

What is Making Connections?

Making Connections is a supplemental/intervention program designed to improve the reading comprehension abilities of students in grades 1 through 6. The program's goal is to equip all students with the strategies necessary to monitor comprehension and construct meaning by implementing these strategies before, during, and after reading informational and narrative text. A further expectation is that rereading text to develop fluency, and increasing word knowledge to develop vocabulary will increase comprehension. A classroom teacher or paraprofessional may teach *Making Connections* in a variety of instructional settings such as the regular classroom, the resource room, or the after-school program.

Each grade level of *Making Connections* is organized by a sequence of skills and themes that can support comprehension instruction throughout the year. There are four units at Level 1 and six units at Levels 2-6. Each unit includes six grade level texts. Four of the texts are found in the consumable Student Book, the fifth text (used for assessment) is located in the Teacher's Edition, and the sixth text is found in the Comprehension Library (one book with longer text for each skill). There are several pacing options to present the six texts in each unit; these options range from three to five weeks. Daily lessons lasting approximately 30 minutes are delivered to large groups, cooperative learning groups, and/or teacher-led small groups. The group size is flexible and is based on the activity. Teachers use an explicit instructional approach to explain and model strategies with a text before, during, and after reading. To begin, the teacher uses before reading strategies that engage the whole group in a discussion to introduce the skill focus; activate background knowledge related to the text's topic; and preview the text structure, purpose, and features. Next, the teacher reads the text aloud while applying during reading strategies that focus on monitoring comprehension through generating questions about the text. The teacher models how to mark the text to identify the comprehension focus and words or phrases that may be difficult to read or understand. Students demonstrate their understanding of this process by marking challenging vocabulary and identifying comprehension skills (e.g., main idea, cause and effect) in their copy of the text. The teacher models vocabulary strategies (i.e., sound out, divide into syllables, and context clues) to clarify word meanings and connect the specific comprehension skill to the text. Students reinforce their understanding of what they have read through small group collaborative discussions designed to synthesize their content knowledge across texts. After reading strategies include rereading the text for fluency, answering questions using the 'practice the skill' worksheet, and writing a summary of the text with teacher support. Text Connections, a culminating activity at the end of each unit, offers a writing activity and a series of higher-level questions based on the texts read that can be explored through whole or small group discussions. As students progress through the different texts, student interactivity and independence with the text increases while teacher modeling and scaffolding decreases.

A scope and sequence in each of the Teacher's Editions outlines the sequence for teaching the comprehension skills (i.e., identifying detail, sequencing, main idea, compare and contrast, drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes, fact and opinion,

cause and effect, and figurative language). The targeted skill is taught and practiced using a variety of content areas and genre in six thematically based texts.

The program components and design are consistent throughout the grade level sequence. The Consumable Student Books present narrative and expository reading selections with corresponding Practice the Skill Assessments. Each text culminates in a skill practice sheet with graphic organizers and short answer questions for students to apply their understanding of the targeted comprehension skill. The Teacher's Editions include the foundational research for the program, explicit directions on how to teach the skills, reduced facsimiles of the student books, and reproducible assessment material. These assessments require the students to read a short text independently and complete the multiple-choice items that assess their understanding of the focus skill. The Comprehension Library provides an authentic reading experience for the students to use their acquired comprehension strategies and skills.

How is Making Connections aligned with Reading First?

Making Connections is a comprehension program that includes some elements of vocabulary and fluency; it is not intended to be a complete reading program. The comprehension strategies and the instructional design are based on the findings of current reading research. In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) published its recommendations regarding effective reading instruction. In the area of comprehension, there was solid support for the use of the following strategies presented in *Making Connections*: monitoring comprehension; cooperative learning; graphic organizers; story structure; answering and generating questions; and summarizing. The NRP report also indicated that it might be most effective to teach multiple strategies to students. These strategies are incorporated into the program as a vehicle for teaching the different comprehension skills.

The instruction is explicit and systematic and lessons include teacher modeling, guided practice, and multiple opportunities for cooperative learning and independent practice. When a new comprehension skill is introduced, it is defined, used in an example, and modeled during the initial reading of the text. In each lesson, teachers think aloud as they model the thought processes used in implementing a strategy so that it becomes obvious to the student. There are also clear procedures for scaffolding instruction as students learn to apply word recognition and comprehension strategies. Additional readings of the same text serve to build fluency and vocabulary that is connected through a common theme.

Educators Publishing Service provides the professional development for the implementation of *Making Connections.* Teachers, reading coaches, and principals participate in a half-day workshop that introduces them to the foundational support and implementation of the comprehension strategies and skills utilized in the program. District personnel may request specific adjustments, as program consultants will accommodate the needs while maintaining the integrity of the program. Further consultation and professional development workshops are available at an additional cost. The Teacher's Edition integrates research support and detailed descriptions of each comprehension skill to help develop the teacher's knowledge base. The fidelity of implementation is insured when teachers follow the strategies and routines that are specified in the teacher materials. *Making Connections* does not require specific levels of implementation for purchasing.

Research Support for Making Connections

Making Connections was recently published and incorporates research-based practices according to the findings from the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), Put Reading First (2001), and Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998). Although the comprehension instruction used in the program is consistent with current research knowledge, no formal research studies regarding its efficacy have been conducted to date.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Making Connections*:
- The instruction is systematic and explicit in the program.
- *Making Connections* incorporates the effective comprehension strategies identified in the Report of the National Reading Panel.
- Although *Making Connections* was designed as a supplemental program, it is strong enough to be used as the primary instructional method to develop comprehension skills.

Weaknesses of *Making Connection*s:
- None were noted.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Making Connections?

There are no elementary schools currently implementing *Making Connections* in Florida.

For More Information

www.epsbooks.com

References

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). (2001). *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read.* Urbana, IL: Author

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Snow, C., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (EDS.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be

a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR. The programs for which reports are available do not constitute an "approved" or "required" list, since many potentially useful programs have not yet been reviewed. For an overview of the conditions under which these reports were prepared, please read the information found here: http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/index.htm

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