Shanahan on Literacy: http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com

[I get what you want us not to do, but what should we do? Getting higher test scores.](http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/2017/01/i-get-what-you-want-us-not-to-do-but.html) (test prep drills, etc)

*Teacher question:*

*I truly want to help teachers strengthen their literacy instruction and students develop and strengthen their reading comprehension. I just viewed your online presentation on “How and How Not to Get Higher Test Scores” and I am intrigued. With only a few short months away from the testing frenzy as you can imagine administrators and teachers are in a panic*

*My goal is to get my 3rd grade students to navigate and comprehend texts more independently. Would you recommend that students analyze text features (titles, headings, and photograph with caption) to make a prediction about what they will be reading initially? Then have students engage in a partner reading of the text and then a silent reading of the text (build fluency) and then mark up the text with annotations (summarizing statements beside each subheading). I would then ask text-dependent questions such as, “what text structure does the author use to explain how caves are formed? How would you explain how the caves are formed? What is the difference between stalactites and stalagmites and how do the photograph and captions help us understand the differences between the two cave features? What point is the author trying to convey to his/her readers by including the ‘Spelunking Dangers” section and “Rules?” What evidence does the author include to support the ideas that spelunking is dangerous?*

*My problem is that I believe that I provide too much support to my students and it tends to enable them. I chunk texts up to promote self-monitoring and summarization but see that my students are having difficulties comprehending longer or multiple passages or texts.*

**Shanahan response:**

Good question. If I were still teaching third grade, what would I do to get higher test scores this spring?

1.    First, I would make sure that my boys and girls were reading a lot—within instruction and, to the extent that I could, beyond the school day. Not only should kids be reading every day in their reading lessons, make sure they are reading in social studies, science, and even in math, too. It might help, for a while, to keep track of the numbers of minutes that is happening; it makes it easier to increase the reading time if you know how much actual reading is taking place—oral and silent. I’m talking about reading text, not talking about text, not listening to someone else read, and not the time kids may be off just reading on their own (but accountable reading). Shoot for at least an hour of school reading per day, and then see if you can stretch that out to more like two hours. That’s a lot of reading!

And, encourage kids to read for enjoyment beyond the school day. You won’t have control over that, of course, but many teachers are effective in getting kids to read. Work with the kids and the librarian to find texts the kids want to read. Enlist parents in supporting this reading. Don’t hesitate to “reward” kids for this reading (that can be as simple as a bookworm that wends around the room showing how many books are being read, to something as complicated as a classroom pizza party once some large numbers of books or pages are read).

2.    Make sure you are having kids read texts that are sufficiently difficult. Pay attention to the Lexile levels that your state has established for third-graders to read. Make sure kids are reading a wide range of texts every day and every week, including texts that are in the specified range. I would also have kids reading books easier and harder than that range (and when you go higher than grade level, be sure to provide plenty of support and make sure the kids know what you are up to).

3.    As you point out, teachers tend to over-support kids’ reading. We teacher educators tend to provide a lot of guidance and support for scaffolding—but we are less explicit about withdrawing this support. But, withdrawing support and just going cold turkey may not be the best bet.

Reciprocal teaching is a good model of withdrawal of scaffolding, so I wouldn’t hesitate to use that—even with other strategies. Initially, the teacher guides the reading process, even demonstrating to the boys and girls how to go about working through a text. This modeling or demonstration is largely or entirely done by the teacher: she implements the strategies—previewing, predicting, reading a portion of the text, asking herself questions, answering those questions, summarizing the text, and then repeating with the next section. The teacher not only does everything but *explains*why she is doing it and how it is supposed to help.

 Then, the teacher starts to shift the responsibilities to the children, and to withdraw support. Initially, the teacher does what you describe, she makes all the decisions and the kids just carry them out. “We need to preview this text. Let’s read the title and look at the first two pictures.” She continues to explain the purposes of the various steps. When the kids can do that well, the teacher pull back even more. Perhaps she has the kids take over explaining the purposes. Or, they start to make the decisions. “I think we should read the whole first section before talking about it.” And so on.   Eventually, the kids should be carrying out the entire process, initially in the group and then individually. All of this—whether guided by the teacher or done cooperatively in groups and pairs or done individually—should be silent reading.

4.    I know the tests are done silently, but kids should be engaged in oral reading as well. Not the kind of round robin reading that many teachers use (there isn’t enough reading when done that way), but things like paired reading or reading while listening. Have kids do this with texts at their frustration level, practicing repeatedly two or three times. The idea is to start with text that you struggle a bit with, but practicing to the point of being able to read the text well. That oral reading improvement will transfer to the silent reading.

5.    You mention annotating texts. You can do that, but annotating doesn’t push kids’ thinking far enough. I would encourage the kids to write about the texts. Yes, you can ask questions and have the kids write answers to them—and your questions are good—but you also can have the children summarize and explain the text (summarizing in writing like that has a big impact on the reading comprehension of third graders). Perhaps the annotations could be used to guide the students to provide

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Good luck.