

## THE IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF TEACHING READING STRATEGIES: IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION

*Nina ROȘCOVAN, Olga DUHLICHER*

*Catedra Limbi Germanice*

Lectura constituie o activitate fundamentală pentru întreținerea condiției intelectuale, îmbogățirea cunoștințelor și a limbajului, pentru cunoașterea indirectă a diferitelor universuri și realități. Lectura aduce cititorilor beneficii mari, care nu pot fi puse la îndoială de nimeni. Acesta este motivul pentru care cititorii trebuie să înțeleagă importanța lecturii.

În acest articol autorii menționează importanța și beneficiile lecturii și, de asemenea, prezintă strategiile efective de îmbunătățire a comprehensiunii unui text în procesul de lectură. Aceste strategii sunt esențiale nu doar pentru comprehensiunea scrisă, dar și pentru a depăși barierele în lectură, pentru a deveni un cititor mai bun.

Reading is a complex area, and it is sometimes described as a quest for meaning that requires the reader to be an active participant. A dictionary would give you the definition of a skill or an activity of getting information from books. Furthermore it has a number of common interpretations. Firstly it may mean *reading aloud*, which involves understanding the black marks first and then the production of the right noises. For those who teach foreign languages it is closer to 'pronunciation' than it is to 'comprehension'. Secondly, it may also mean '*silent reading*' as it is well known that the greatest amount of reading that is done in the world is silent. A reading room is a silent room. But the nature of the silent reading skill varies according to the use to which it is being put. Some of the uses would be: to *survey material* which is to be studied, to look through indexes, chapter headings and outlines, to *skim*—particularly when looking for a specific item of information in a mass of other printed information, to *scan* to get a general idea of what a text offers, to gain *general understanding*, as when reading for pleasure, to *study* or learn the content of what is read in some detail, to *study the language* in which the material is written [1].

Some define the process of reading as the retrieval of information in a nonliterary text, or take on wider meanings like 'reading the situation'. When we speak about reading we usually have in mind the reading of a particular kind of text—one that is in the form of printed language. Sometimes the assumption is even more specific, referring only to books or even to particular kinds of books termed literature. In general parlance the verb 'to read' is used much more widely; to talk, for example, of reading faces, tea leaves, the weather, people. There is a common expression, 'I can read you like a book'. This broader definition is indicative of the fact that the reading of print is only one instance of a much more widely applied human faculty. It can be mentioned that people read the world around, they give meaning to the patterns they see in it.

Some researchers examine the idea of reading as 'an inherently social process' and the ways in which the reconstruction and renegotiation of meaning transforms 'readings' into 'culture'. Using examples from media texts they explore the 'cultural experiences and competencies' evident in the classroom and reflect on the implications for the future society of neglecting these reading experiences. The demands of this future society are evident too in the way that the concept of reading is now understood to include information skills—a need for information literacy [2].

There are many reasons why reading (teaching reading) is important. Students need to be able to read English texts for their study purposes, for their future careers or for their own pleasure. Reading is definitely one of the basic skills in the process of learning a language. Furthermore any exposure to English is beneficial for the student as it provides good models of English writing, as well it is a great opportunity to learn new vocabulary, revise and enhance their grammar and punctuation knowledge. Reading is a skill very much needed in the process of language acquisition, and can make it exciting and engaging; it can introduce interesting topics and stimulate discussions.

In addition, arguments for the importance of this skill abound in the amount of reading research conducted in the last few decades, which has enriched the knowledge about the nature of reading comprehension. One strong outcome of this research is that it shifts the skill of reading that was traditionally considered passive with no place in Foreign Language teaching, to a process increasingly recognized as interactive and constructive with a key role in developing learners' communicative competence [3].

If we look at what is involved in the reading of narrative there will be aspects peculiar to that form but there will be many others that are common to other texts and purposes.

Readers first have to make a correlation between the shapes on the page and the language in their heads. To be effective readers it is necessary to be able to relate particular shapes to particular sounds and meanings. This is the process often referred to as **decoding**. Therefore there are several components in the reading skill: the recognition of the black marks, the correlation of these with formal linguistic elements, and the further correlation of the result with meaning.

In the reading of narrative readers need to be able to relate to a large number of conventions. They need to be able to read within or against the rules of particular genres. These rules help the reader to decide what is acceptable, plausible rather than possible, within the world of that story. Writers also often deliberately break the conventions in order to achieve effects. Students need to be given access to the widest range of genres. They also need opportunities to explore the conventions of genres and to explore the ways in which texts are structured if they are to become powerful readers, and writers, of narrative. Texts are not entirely self-contained; they refer to the world. Texts assume knowledge on the part of the reader. Sometimes the knowledge is factually based and refers to objects, events and people [4].

The teaching of reading involves movement beyond the confines of the text out into the world to which it refers and the world inhabited by its readers. The relationship between the perceptions, understandings and values of these two world views must be explored.

Reading Strategies are essential, not only to successful comprehension, but to overcoming reading problems and becoming a better reader and comprehender.

There are several strategies that help readers improve their comprehension during the process of reading, they help them become active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension. As comprehension increases so does appreciation of reading for both knowledge and pleasure, thus to be successful at reading comprehension, students need to actively process what they read. The comprehended knowledge would include engaged learning, personal connection, background knowledge, meaningful context, prediction, critical analysis and metacognition.

1. The **previewing** and **motivating** process begins with activating prior knowledge, building connections, establishing goals for reading with purpose, and pre-teaching information needed for successful comprehension of the particular text. The teacher should keep in mind the goals of connecting with past experiences and real-worlds applications, his students' personal interest, as well as captivating their interest through novelty and imagination stimulation. The teacher can activate his students' background through discussion about interesting topics that will be included in the text before they read it, let the students share their knowledge about the author. The previewing can be achieved by providing the students the big picture first by inviting guest speakers, showing related videos, organizing field trips, bringing current even stories in newspapers etc.

2. **Pre-reading** activities prepare students for the content and focus of the text to be read. Its goal is to give students an overview of the topic, story or book so they can develop mental templates upon which they will pattern the new information. Pre-reading can include activities to build interest and attention (by asking questions about the book topic or by reading a surprising or intriguing passage from the story/book), explore keywords, create connections and establish reading goals (when a part of their goals includes finding information to support their predictions or to answer their questions, students approach the reading with more motivation, and it stimulates active thinking).

3. **Predicting** is an activity that will stimulate the students use their prior knowledge and look for information in the new text to confirm or refute their predictions, thus it motivates them to follow the story through personal engagement. A good type of prediction activity is a non-graded true/false, multiple choice, or fill-in-the-blank prediction page.

4. **Answering questions** has been proven to improve comprehension as it focuses readers' attention on what they are to learn, it makes them think actively as they read as well as it helps them review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know [5].

5. **Generating questions** and **inferring**, is a process that teaches students to ask themselves or others questions that require them to combine information from different parts of the text and can engage problem-solving processes that build interest.

6. **Self-monitoring** (or metacognition) requires students to stop periodically to take notes of the words they do not know or understand, or sometimes the parts of the plot that do not make sense to them. Through instruction and modeling students can also be taught to stop periodically to construct mental images and do independent summaries of their understanding of the action or character.

7. **Recognizing the story structure** which would include the following categories of content; characters, setting, events, problem, resolution. Sometimes the students can use story maps to help them.

8. The use of **graphic** and **semantic organizers** which are known by different names, such as maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters. (We could annex some of the, eg Venn diagram, or cause/effect or story map.) Regardless of their name, these organizers can help students read and focus on the text structure, or it would provide them with the tools to examine and show relationships in the text; and finally it would help them write well-organized summaries of the text. Examples of useful graphic organizers are: Venn-diagrams (used to compare or contrast information from two stories), Story Map (used to chart the story structure), Chain of Events or Timelines (used to order or sequence events in a text), Cause/effect (used to illustrate the cause and effects told within a text).

9. **Summarizing** requires the learners to determine the most important information and relate it in their own words; furthermore for an effective summary they have to identify the main ideas, to connect them and to eliminate unnecessary information. It connects reading and memory by linking understanding of text to remembering.

10. **Comparing** and **contrasting** helps students to make associations between elements of story, character, setting and theme. The teacher can organize debates where the students will take sides and support their points of view, they can discuss similarities and differences between their lives and those of the characters.

11. Additional comprehension skills that must be taught and practiced include assessing and connecting with their background knowledge, pre-teaching of the new vocabulary, clarification of key concepts, linking to prior knowledge and personal relevance, teacher-guided and student-centered discussions about the content, previewing and teacher feedback for understanding. Independent comprehension activities such as papers, projects, or original graphic organizers can give students opportunities to demonstrate their comprehension and their improvement. **Literature Logs** are personal journals where students respond to the book. In their logs, students are prompted to include quotes, paraphrase conversations, and briefly summarize parts of the plot that cause them to stop and think. When they summarize data as notes, they are making judgments and engaging in critical analyses when they effectively delete or merge information [6].

It's also crucial that the students practice using the strategies. This could be achieved in a classroom in numerous ways. For example, the students could be placed in pairs and asked to take turns self-explaining a portion of the textbook. The teacher can also have the students self-explain as a class—calling on students to begin or continue self-explanations and asking the students to write out self-explanations for selected sentences in text. These simple exercises may have important benefits, particularly for the struggling students.

It should be noted that explicit teaching techniques are particularly effective for comprehension strategy instruction. Thus the teachers would tell their readers why and when they would use the reading comprehension strategies, which strategies they should use, and most importantly how to apply them. The basic steps of explicit instruction usually include: direct explanation (the teacher explains the students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy), teacher modeling (the teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, while reading the text that the students are using), guided practice (the teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy), and application (the teacher helps students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently). Effective strategy instruction can be achieved through cooperative learning, which would mean the students working together as partners or in small groups on clearly defined tasks, thus the students work together to understand the text; they help each other apply comprehension strategies.

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