

TEACHING READING

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*The Nature of Reading. The position of reading among other skills.
The reading process. Important aspects of teaching reading.
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The nature of reading The position of reading among other skills

There are many theories of reading. Some regard reading as a skill which relies heavily on our visual perception and ability to recognise words, letter shapes, sound patterns and so on. Other theories regard reading much like looking at a picture, where we read to get the whole message and the bits and pieces are not important singularly. Reading instruction often focuses on items of knowledge - words, letters, sounds. Most people respond to this type of teaching. They search for links between the items and they relate new discoveries to old knowledge (Harmer, 1991:33-34). So there are many things which go on inside a reader's head when reading occurs. Reading is like any other skill we learn. For example, when we first try to pronounce a sentence in English, we tend to speak very slowly, and with not much stability. The more confident and braver we become, the slower and steadier we are until we learn how to control our speed. So when we decide to produce relatively spontaneous utterances, we can usually control the pace, so we avoid confusion. Sometimes we can increase the speed, other times we purposely reduce the speed when we realise that if we don't we could get mixed up. When we learn to speed read, we use the same technique as we would use with the other three skills, writing, listening and speaking. Although reading is considered, together with listening, a rather passive skill, it is in fact can such be active as writing and speaking, and teaching them is even more active. Not all students enter the reading process through the same "door." Some enter the reading process through writing. Others enter by listening to fluent readers read. Students need a variety of invitations to feel like reading, and teachers need to provide a variety of activities throughout the school day to engage them in reading. Reading can

be defined as interpreting a system of symbols and it is definitely a skill that will not fade, however, nowadays it is not as fashionable as it had been before other media, ie. television and the Internet, came into fashion. Reading is usually done at your own speed, especially in the case of reading at home. Reading is a transferable skill between languages, where word recognition can be more important than the strict knowledge of syntactic reading rules, or perhaps the lack of it.

The reading process

The reading process is an extremely complex one actively involving both hemispheres of the brain. Nevertheless, I will try to simplify this process by breaking it down into three major steps:

1. Identification - This involves the pupil's ability to associate meaning with words as they appear in his reading. This to me, is the basis of reading; for sounding out phonemes and morphemes means nothing to the student if he cannot identify or call upon either context clues or his own experiences to bring meaning or comprehension to the word. Yet it is these very two skills which the innercity student lacks: context, because his comprehension skills have not been adequately developed; and meaningful educational experiences, either because of different cultural values or pressures or because of lack of money. These problems can be solved to a great extent by providing these experiences (field trips or by audio visual methods).

2. Organization - This is the process whereby the reader organizes the ideas presented to produce a logical result. I am sure that you will agree that many of our students, especially in the developmental and basic levels, wrestle with this problem of organization, both in understanding what they read, and in their own writing. They (the students) want to say a lot but it comes out all confused. This is especially brought out in writing, whether it be answering given comprehension questions or paragraph or essay writing.

3. Reaction - This involves an emotional and intellectual reaction which most naturally will depend on the type of material the student reads and the reader's attitude and purpose. Thus if reading has been pleasurable because the student has been able to identify successfully (emotionally and intellectually) with the text, and to organize the material, then the student will want to read more. This desire will set off a chain reaction which will lead to more reading, and the more the student reads, the better he will read. I think this is one of our goals as teachers.

Reading is often thought of as a hierarchy of skills, from the processing of individual letters and their associated sounds to word recognition to text-processing competencies. Skilled comprehension requires fluid articulation of all these processes, beginning with the sounding out and recognition of individual words to the understanding of sentences in paragraphs as part of much longer texts. There is instruction at all of these levels that can be carried out so as to increase student understanding of what is read (Grellet, 1981).

Decoding. Perhaps it is a truism, but students cannot understand texts if they cannot read the words. Before they can read the words, they have to be aware of the letters and the sounds represented by letters so that sounding out and blending of sounds can occur to pronounce words. Once pronounced, the good reader notices whether the word as recognized makes sense in the sentence and the text context being read and, if it does not, takes another look at the word to check if it might have been misread (Krashen, 1981). Being able to sound out a word does not guarantee that the word will

be understood as the student reads. When students are first learning to sound out English words it requires real mental effort. The more effort required, the less consciousness left over for other cognitive operations, including comprehension of the words being sounded out. Thus, it is critical for students to develop fluency in word recognition.

Fluent (i.e., automatic) word recognition consumes little cognitive capacity, freeing up the student's cognitive capacity for understanding what is read. Anyone who has ever taught beginners and witnessed round-robin reading can recall students who could sound out a story with great effort but at the end had no idea of what had been read.

Important aspects of teaching reading

Objectives of a reading lesson. Before starting to plan a reading lesson, you should decide on the objective of the reading lesson, ie. why you want your students to read. In an ideal world you first would set your objectives and then find a text that will help you achieve them. In practice, however, we often come across something that seems interesting for the students and then decide what you can achieve from it, and in this case, the text controls the objective. The important thing is to have some clear objectives before you begin to plan the lesson. The following three objectives are possible to be achieved in one lesson:

To improve reading subskills: According to some teachers, the best way to teach reading is to break the reading skills down into separate sub-skills by looking at what a good reader does when he goes about reading something, teach these separately and then put them all together. The other big group is sceptical and believe that there is no chance of putting all the sub-skills together and at the end they add up to the complete picture. In my opinion, if a student is able to use his reading sub-skills in the mother tongue, then the only problem is the English language. On the other hand, if they are still read badly and with difficulties in the first language, then it takes twice as much time to perform the given task.

To study language: The teacher focuses the students' attention on vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and discourse features. Although studying language for the sake of studying language is fairly pointless outside universities, there is little doubt that students need a very good command of language if they are going to be able to read. Moreover, by studying texts the students can see how the language is used in both a situational and a linguistic context, which is much more useful than studying them in isolated sentences.

To read for content: The students focus on the facts or ideas contained in the text. Extracting meaning is obviously essential in order to achieve this objective. This is usually why we read in real life. The first two objectives, developing reading skills and studying language, are really only tools for achieving this broader educational objective. However, many textbooks contain uninspiring texts and you should consider supplementing them with other texts.

Reading subskills

Knowledge of core vocabulary. Word knowledge has particular importance in literate societies. It contributes significantly to achievement in the subjects of the school curriculum, as well as in formal and informal speaking and writing. Most people feel that there is a common sense relationship between

vocabulary and comprehension - messages are composed of ideas, and ideas are expressed in words. Most theorists and researchers in education have assumed that vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related, and numerous studies have shown the strong correlation between the two.

From a teacher's point of view the issue in the classroom usually revolves around how to improve the student's reading comprehension, whether it be in content area reading or in the language arts. Should the teacher teach vocabulary directly or incidentally? That is, should words be targeted for the learners or should they develop naturally through reading and the learner's desire to clarify concepts? Evidence falls in both directions. It is generally accepted that students learn vocabulary more effectively when they are directly involved in constructing meaning rather than in memorizing definitions or synonyms. Thus, techniques such as webbing that involve students' own perspectives in creating interactions that gradually clarify targeted vocabulary may be a way to combine direct teaching and incidental learning in one exercise (Krashen, 1981). Teachers can use students' personal experiences to develop vocabulary in the classroom. Through informal activities such as semantic association students brainstorm a list of words associated with a familiar word, pooling their knowledge of pertinent vocabulary as they discuss the less familiar words on the list. Semantic mapping goes a step further, grouping the words on the list into categories and arranging them on the visual "map" so that relationships among the words become clearer. In semantic feature analysis, words are grouped according to certain features, usually with the aid of a chart that graphically depicts similarities and differences among features of different words. Finally, analogies are a useful way of encouraging thoughtful discussion about relationships among meanings of words. It is well established that good comprehenders tend to have good vocabularies (Mackay, 1978). This correlation, however, does not mean that teaching vocabulary will increase readers' comprehension, for that is a causal conclusion. As it turns out, however, when reading educators conducted experiments in which vocabulary was either taught to students or not, comprehension improved as a function of vocabulary instruction.

Subsequent comprehension tests. One counterargument to this advice to teach vocabulary is that children learn vocabulary incidentally - that is, they learn the meanings of many words by experiencing those words in the actual world and in text worlds, without explicit instruction (Littlewood, 1981). 'Even so, such incidental learning is filled with potential pitfalls, for the meanings learned range from richly contextualized and more than adequate to incomplete to wrong. Just the other morning, I sat in a reading class as a teacher asked students to guess the meanings of new words encountered in a story, based on text and picture clues.' Many of the definitions offered by the students were way off. Anyone who has ever taught beginners knows that they benefit from explicit teaching of vocabulary. That children do develop knowledge of vocabulary through incidental contact with new words they read is one of the many reasons to encourage students to read extensively. Whenever researchers have looked, they have found vocabulary increases as a function of children's reading of text rich in new words (Wallace, 1992).

Agnes was a student of mine who was frustrated because she could not read grade-level material. When I asked her how I might help, she knew exactly what she needed: "Teach me what words mean so I can understand what I read."

Guessing words from the context. In almost any text the reader will meet new words. It is too time consuming to look all of them up in a dictionary

and so the reader must develop the skill of guessing from context. Besides, the translation in a bilingual dictionary can be misleading if the student cannot find the suitable meaning, which would perfectly fit in the meaning of the sentence. I believe that a text, or sentences cannot and must not be translated word by word, and sometimes it can be quite annoying when students insist on knowing the Hungarian meaning of a particular English word, which might not have a meaningful, but only a functional role. The other thing that can really improve the ability of guessing words from the context, is the students' background knowledge. Develop a broad background: Broaden your background knowledge by reading newspapers, magazines and books. Become interested in world events. Reading comprehension can be affected by world knowledge, with many demonstrations that readers who possess rich prior knowledge about the topic of a reading often understand the reading better than classmates with low prior knowledge (Anderson & Lynch, 1984). That said, readers do not always relate their world knowledge to the content of a text, even when they possess knowledge relevant to the information it presents. Often, they do not make inferences based on prior knowledge unless the inferences are absolutely demanded to make sense of the text (Goodman, 1984). One way to accomplish this is to encourage extensive reading of high-quality, information-rich texts by young readers (Cunningham, 1990).

Typically, however, when readers process text containing new factual information, they do not automatically relate that information to their prior knowledge, even if they have a wealth of knowledge that could be related. In many cases, more is needed for prior knowledge to be beneficial in reading comprehension. A large number of experiments conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s demonstrated the power of "Why?" questions, or "elaborative interrogation," to encourage readers to orient to their prior knowledge as they read (Martin, 1987). In these studies, readers were encouraged to ask themselves why the facts being presented in text made sense. This encouragement consistently produced a huge effect on memory of the texts, with the most compelling explanation emerging from analytical experiments because of the interrogation oriented readers to prior knowledge that could explain the facts being encountered. The lesson that emerged from these studies is that readers should be encouraged to relate what they know to information-rich texts they are reading, with a potent mechanism for doing this being elaborative interrogation.

Predicting. Good readers tend to make predictions as they read and then check these predictions against what is actually in the text. It is thought that this is how we extract meaning from the text:

- 1) An explicit description of the strategy and when it should be used:
"Predicting is making guesses about what will come next in the text you are reading. You should make predictions a lot when you read. For now, you should stop every two pages that you read and make some predictions."
- 2) Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action: "I am going to make predictions while I read this story. I'll start with just the photographs here. I see a picture some celebrities. It looks like that they are very happy and satisfied. I predict that this is going to be a very interesting story about famous people who have something in common. I predict it is going to be about their life". Or: "The title will give me more clues about the text; the title is The 'name game' winners. So this makes me think even more that this book is going to be about something that is characteristic of all the celebrities in the pictures. Probably it will be about their names, they may have

special names..." And: "Okay, I've made some predictions about the text based on the pictures and the title. Now I'm going to begin reading the first passage."

- 3) Collaborative use of the strategy in action: "I've made some good predictions so far in the text. From this part on I want you to make predictions with me. Each of us should stop and think about what might happen next... Okay, now let's hear what you think and why..."
- 4) Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility: early on "I've called the three of you together to work on making predictions while you read this story. After every passage I will ask each of you to stop and make a prediction. We will talk about your predictions and then read on to see if they come true." Later on: "Each of you has a chart that lists different passages in your text. When you finish reading the first sentence of the paragraph, stop and make a prediction. Write the prediction in the column that says "Prediction." When you get to the next page on the list, check off whether your prediction "Happened," "Will not happen," or "Still might happen." Then make another prediction and write it down."
- 5) Independent use of the strategy: "It's time for silent reading. As you read today, remember what we've been working on-making predictions while we read. Be sure to make predictions every two or three passages. Ask yourself why you made the prediction you did - what made you think that. Check as you read to see whether or not your prediction came true."

At least some of the texts used during these different phases of comprehension instruction should be chosen to be particularly well-suited to the application of the specific strategy being learned. Just as many have recommended using texts in decoding instructions that emphasize the particular sound-letter relationships students are learning, so too do we recommend linking closely the comprehension strategy being taught and the texts to which it is initially applied and practiced. Also as it is recommended for decoding instructions, we recommend careful attention to the level and demands of texts used in different phases of instruction, especially the early phases. When students are first learning a comprehension strategy, they should encounter texts that do not make heavy demands in other respects, such as background knowledge, vocabulary load, or decoding.

Reading strategies

The good reader does not read in the same way and at the same speed. It always depends on the type of text and the reason for reading. Time spent reading is important. Students should read extensively both in and out of the lesson to polish their basic reading skills and develop fluency. During the classes, students need large chunks of time to read extended texts for a variety of purposes: for information, for pleasure, and for exploration. The key to becoming a proficient reader is practice, practice, and more practice. In order to do it in a more enjoyable way, they need to be exposed to a variety of genres and authors, as well as to materials they find relevant and engaging.

Students need to talk with others about what they are reading. Learning is a social event. Interacting with their peers around their reading experiences

enhances the learning for students and increases their motivation to read. Foreign language learners need quality teachers and high-quality instruction.

According to recent studies, neither the parent's level of education nor the family's socioeconomic status are as important as the quality of the teacher and the teacher's instruction in predicting student achievement.

Extensive reading. This is a very important type of reading where students read longer texts often in their own time. It is unlikely that students will ever become fluent readers if they do not get the opportunity to do some extensive reading. So during my teaching career, I indeed investigate ways of giving my students some extensive reading. When students practise this kind of reading strategy, they are looking for the gist, the global understanding of the text.

Skimming. It means that with this strategy, students are reading in order to find the main points. For example, when reading a newspaper, you are looking for the main points and not really interested in every article it contains. It is just glancing on the text, your eyes pass quickly over the list and you select the information you need.

Scanning. Reading to find details. When you read the contents page you do not start from the top and read every word. Your eyes pass quickly over the list and you select the information that you need. You are trying to locate a specific piece of information, only interested in one thing, and do not bother about the rest.

Intensive reading. You are reading for details, to get all the information from the text, it was typical of the grammar-translation method, and for example when you are filling in an application form, or read a manual, you are certainly applying this strategy.

Selecting the text

Although there are some good reasons why we use the texts in the textbook, for example to make preparation easy, to control lexical and grammatical items, I do not rely on the textbook all the time. Many texts have little interest for the students and they lack variety. If this is the case, you should consider finding (or even writing yourself) supplementary reading texts. The first step is to select a text that your students have not read - a good story with a significant topic appropriate for your grade level, a clearly identifiable problem and resolution, well-developed characters, and high interest for your students (Dressler, 1981).

Language difficulty. The number of new words that is acceptable in a text depends highly on the objectives of the lesson. If you want to practice skimming or scanning, then it is not necessary for students to know every word. However, if you want them to read intensively then too many new words would cause problems. I have experienced that more than approximately 10% unfamiliar words in a reading text reaches students' frustration level. On the other hand, if students know all the words, then they will not get the opportunity to practice guessing new words, and they will miss an essential reading skill.

As for grammar, I have found that new or difficult grammatical items are less of an obstacle to understanding the new vocabulary. It has been proved that sentence length is a good indicator of grammatical difficulty: beginners texts typically have 11-20 sentences per 100 words (5-9 words per sentence), intermediate texts have about 4.5-6.5 sentences per 100 words - 15-22 words per sentence (Dressler, 1981).

The length of the texts depends undoubtedly on what strategy is to be used during reading, if students have to read intensively, then the text shouldn't be too long, but if it is only skimming, than longer texts might as well suitable. It also depend on whether students are to do the reading at home, so they can use their own time, or reading is to be done in the lesson, so that they have to be ready in a certain time.

If students are allowed to select their own texts, then the optimal language difficulty is ought to be monitored by the teacher. Teachers can monitor students' and their own selections to ensure that all students spend most of their time reading texts that are appropriate in difficulty - not so hard that a student's cognitive resources are occupied with just figuring out how to pronounce the words and not so easy that nothing new is likely to be learned.

Topic. Teachers can give students opportunities and guidance in making text selections. Although we know of no research that directly links choice to reading comprehension growth, we speculate that choice is related to interest and motivation, both of which are related directly to learning (Anderson & Lynch, 1984). It is very difficult to do a good reading lesson with a dull text. You should consider if the text helps them to think about the way other people think, and whether the text tells them things they already know.

Text type. Students should be exposed to many different kinds of text partly in the name of variety and partly to expose them to different registers. Here is a brief list of text types I normally use in reading lessons: fiction-narrative stories, factual accounts, advertisements, timetables, newspaper articles, poems, plays, letters, reviews.

Authenticity of texts: I regard authenticity very important and students must be taught, reminded, and given time to practice comprehension strategies while reading everyday texts - not just specially constructed materials or short workbook passages. We would like to see real texts used more and earlier in comprehension strategy instruction. Using real texts, we believe, will increase the likelihood that students will transfer the use of taught strategies to their independent reading - and that, after all, is the ultimate goal of instruction.

Reading the text

To practice their reading skills, students need to spend the majority of their daily reading time with engaging books, texts, stories they can read with fluency and success; thus, they need to read materials of their own choosing every day.

Pre-reading activities prepare students to read the upcoming selection. They can get students interested in reading the selection, remind students of things they already know that will help them understand and enjoy the selection, and pre-teach aspects of the selection that students may find difficult. Pre-reading activities are important because only with adequate preparation will the experience of reading be enjoyable, rewarding, and successful. Pre-reading options include motivating students, relating the reading to students' lives, activating background knowledge, building text-specific knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary, pre-teaching concepts, pre-questioning, predicting, setting directions, and suggesting reading strategies. Reading activities include both things that students themselves do as they are reading and things that teachers do to assist them as they are reading. Reading options include silent reading by students, oral reading by teachers,

teacher-guided reading, oral reading by students, and teacher modification of the text (Lindop, 1988).

Silent reading. This allows the student to read at his/her own pace and to go back and read parts that are difficult. The problem for the teacher is that she has no evidence that the students are actually reading. That's why my teaching lessons are slightly different. We usually negotiate meaning socially. "Silent" reading time shouldn't be entirely silent. Teachers can allow part of the time for reading in pairs, including pairs of different abilities and ages; and provide regular opportunities for readers to discuss their reading with the teacher and with one another. I view reading comprehension as a social as well as a cognitive process. Conversation not only raises the status of independent silent reading from a time filler to an important part of the reading program; it also gives students another opportunity to practice and build comprehension skills collaboratively, a topic to which we return below.

Teacher reads aloud. It is important for the students to hear fluent readers read. By reading aloud, teachers and parents model fluent reading, broaden reading interests by exposing kids to genres and authors they might not discover on their own, and encourage positive attitudes toward reading. Occasionally read aloud to students—this can be a useful technique in getting students interested in reading and modelling the right pronunciation and intonation. Since the teacher generally knows what books, stories, articles or texts are particularly good, reading aloud a few good stories and then suggesting others that are similar, can go a long way toward leading students to read. If a student realizes that his classmates are captured by the "magic" of a story, he may feel that he is really missing something and he will join the crowd. The only problem with this way is that students have to read at the teachers pace

Reading aloud. To my mind, students need to be read aloud to every day although it is a very controversial area and many writers argue strongly against it. The following arguments are typical:

- It is not a skill which is useful in real life. Reading is basically a private, personal activity and only a few people, for example, news readers, tv announcers, teachers or sometimes spokesmen ever need to read aloud in their daily lives.
- The main objective of reading is to get meaning from the text. When you are reading aloud it is very difficult to focus on meaning because you are so concerned with pronunciation problems.
- It wastes class time. Only one student is reading and the others are doing nothing.

However, I have used and will continue to use reading aloud based on the following reasons:

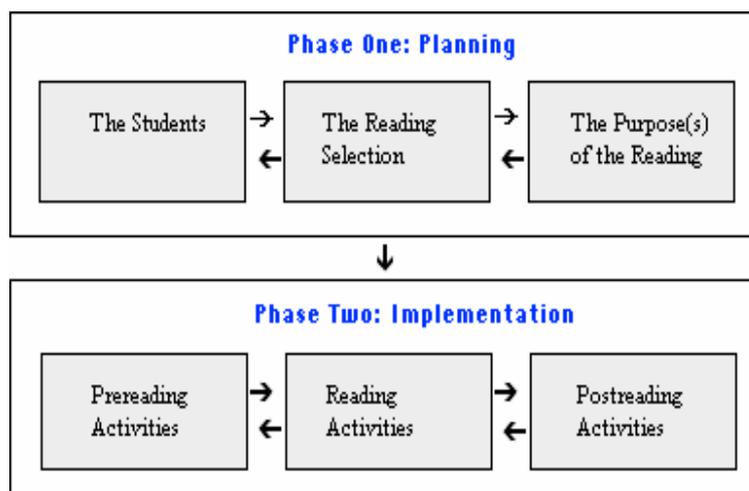
- I have some evidence that the students are actually reading.
- It helps to establish the link between the written form of the word and its spoken form. This will enable the students to add words they read to their productive vocabulary. And we should not forget that English is very difficult because the written form of a word and how to pronounce it are two things...

To avoid this controversy, I often make my students to read a text at home, so when they come to the classroom, they will have already done the comprehension, so our task is only to concentrate on the pronunciation.

Post reading activities serve many purposes. They provide opportunities for students to synthesize and organize information gleaned from the text so

that they can understand and recall important points. They allow students to evaluate an author's message, his or her stance in presenting the message, and the quality of the text itself. They allow both teachers and students to evaluate students' understanding of the text. And they provide opportunities for students to respond to a text in a variety of ways - to reflect on the meaning of the text, to compare differing texts and ideas, to imagine themselves as characters in the text to synthesize information from different sources.

Table: Phases of reading



Levels of reading

Basic. This is the first level, and it is more or less the interpretation of symbols, the focus is on the words, and the type of material is known. They are beginners and texts should be short, with fairly easy grammar and limited vocabulary

Intermediate. This level focuses on phrases and sentences, instead of words, so these students are generally capable of recognizing fixed expressions, words that go together, phrasal verbs and can comprehend more compounded sentences. A reorganized material is suitable at this stage.

Achieving fluency. As soon as students reach almost fluent reading, they concentrate on paragraphs rather than sentences and it is possible to use material with some unknown elements. As my group of students are approximately at this level, more detailed description of this stage is necessary.

Clark (1976) carried out a study that emphasized the importance when primary-level readers were taught 10 new words, with word-recognition instruction to the point of fluency. In their study, struggling to emphasize word recognition to the point of fluency (they practiced reading the individual words until they could recognize them automatically) or understanding of the words (instruction involving mostly student-teacher discussions about word meanings). Following instructions, the students read a passage containing the words and answered comprehension questions about it. The students who had learned to recognize the words to the point of automaticity answered more comprehension questions than did students who experienced instruction emphasizing individual word meanings. Consistent with other analyses, Tan and Nicholson's outcome made it obvious that the

development of fluent word-recognition skills can make an important difference in students' understanding of what they read. Thus, a first recommendation to educators who want to improve students' comprehension skills is to teach them to decode well. Explicit instruction in sounding out words, which has been so well validated as helping many learners to recognize words more certainly, is a start in developing good comprehenders - but it is just a start. Word-recognition skills must be developed to the point of fluency if comprehension benefits are to be maximized (Clark, 1976).

Advanced. Only a few learners of English can regard themselves advanced readers of English. This title applies to those who are able to focus on longer speeches or discourse with unpredicted discourse material. Good readers are extremely active as they read, as is apparent whenever excellent adult readers are asked to think aloud as they go through text (Brusch, 1991). Good readers are aware of why they are reading a text, gain an overview of the text before reading, make predictions about the upcoming text, read selectively based on their overview, associate ideas in text to what they already know, note whether their predictions and expectations about text content are being met, revise their prior knowledge when compelling new ideas conflicting with prior knowledge are encountered, figure out the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary based on context clues, underline and reread and make notes and paraphrase to remember important points, interpret the text, evaluate its quality, review important points as they conclude reading, and think about how ideas encountered in the text might be used in the future.

The general process of teaching reading

In this section I am going to discuss only the parts that refer to comprehension, as all the other points are discussed in detail in other chapters.

- ✓ Selection of the proper material for students
- ✓ Introduction of the text: the preparation period, when the task is to raise interest, the 'desire to read', it also clarifies the situation and the unfamiliar vocabulary
- ✓ Guiding questions help guessing, predicting, and eliciting answers
- ✓ Silent reading, or reading aloud, individually or in turns
- ✓ Explanation
- ✓ Checking comprehension, follow-up activities

Finally, as with any good instruction, comprehension instruction should be accompanied by ongoing *assessment*. Teachers should monitor students' use of comprehension strategies and their success at understanding what they read. Results of this monitoring should, in turn, inform the teacher's instruction. When a particular strategy continues to be used ineffectively, or not at all, the teacher should respond with additional instruction or a modified instructional approach. At the same time, students should be monitoring their own use of comprehension strategies, aware of their strengths as well as their weaknesses as developing comprehenders.

Time to Talk About Reading. Some form of discussion or explication of a text has been a feature of reading classrooms for years, but traditional teacher-student discussions have been consistently criticized because they emphasize teacher control and learning a single interpretation. Critics have tended to advocate student-centered discussions that honor multiple interpretations. There is a new way of discussing the material: the teacher

initiates a question, a student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response before moving to another question. Recently, various forms of teacher-student discussions have been geared toward achieving the following three goals.

Changing teacher-student interaction patterns. In the traditional recitation format, teachers choose the topics and, through feedback to students, control which student answers are viewed as correct and incorrect. One outcome of the recitation format is that teachers talk a lot! Typically, teachers talk as much as or more than all students combined, because their questions and feedback focus on transmitting the text interpretation they have in mind and because of the monitoring function that teachers naturally perform when they are in charge of a discussion.

In responsive teaching, teachers plan instruction by anticipating a range of student responses in addition to thinking about their own interpretations. They then use student input into discussions and student text interpretations to move the discussion to higher levels. Teachers might still nominate topics and opinions for group consideration, but student input drives the discussion forward. Changing the pattern of classroom discussions to allow more student input and control is no easy task (Ellis, 1989).

Problems of teaching reading

Struggling readers often have fluency problems. Picture in your mind one of your struggling readers. They are likely to read word by word, halting, slow, and laborious. Students with these reading characteristics have a fluency problem. Educators often describe reading problems in terms of fluency, and research demonstrates a correlation between fluency and reading comprehension. Struggling readers do not read enough. Students become fluent readers by reading.

Also, poor fluency is a self-perpetuating problem. Struggling readers read so few words during their instructional and independent reading time that the gap between them and their peers continually widens. What do struggling readers need to become fluent? Struggling readers need a safe, structured, and highly motivating opportunity to engage in reading on a daily basis. Research supports teacher modelling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring as ways to involve struggling students in the act of reading, to improve students' reading fluency, and to accelerate students' reading achievement.

Finally, daily monitoring of student progress improves student achievement (Schunk, 1982). Combining teacher modeling, repeated reading, and self-monitoring of progress creates a powerful tool to attack the fluency problem of struggling readers.

An important question is still waiting to be answered: With all these reasons for the need of reading skill, why then do innercity students perform so inadequately in reading? Once more we've touched on a complex problem on which volumes have been written. However, I will briefly mention a few of the internal and external factors which affect one's reading:

1. Physical-vision, hearing, lateral dominance, one's sex and health.
2. Mental-intelligence, conceptualization, language, mental immaturity
3. and listening.
4. Emotional-selfconcept, subject matter, and teacher effect.
5. Socioeconomic-low socioeconomic status, family mobility and stability. There is much dispute about whether these are direct causes of reading difficulties. On the other hand, there is little doubt

- that their influences will have some bearing upon other conditions such as interest in learning and expectations of success, which can affect one's progress in reading.
6. Educational-inadequate teaching of reading, inadequately prepared teachers,
 7. poor teacher strategy, overemphasis on one reading skill, indiscriminate use of reading materials, inadequate and unsuitable instructional material, teacher bias, poor or insensitive administration.
 8. Lack of motivation - on the part of the student and the teacher.

It is my firm belief that this is one of the important factors underlying the low performance in reading. From the research that I have done, I have discovered these other motivators of reading: reading for entertainment, need for novelty, need to know, feeling of power in decoding, freedom attained through access to ideas, vicarious adventures into the unknown, alternative solutions to interpersonal relationships, learning of sex roles and aesthetic experiences. I am sure that at some time we, as teachers, have used some of these motivators when, through use of interest questionnaires, we found out just where our students were, and we provided suitable reading. But what happens to the disadvantaged who has had only negative experiences and negative role models? How is he motivated? (Richek & McTague, 1988)

Classroom research

Exploring reading in the classroom

Reciprocal teaching: "I Read It, But I Don't Get It!" If you have students who have difficulty reading, especially informational text, reciprocal teaching PLS (Powerful Literacy Strategies) may be the answer. Reciprocal teaching is a process, not a program, designed to help struggling readers with reading comprehension. I often use it in my teaching practise, and with success. It is based on four strategies used by all good readers. *These strategies - predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing - comprise the "game plan" for reading.* In collaborative groups, students talk with each other and in a structured format "make meaning" of text. They monitor their own comprehension and learning. As a group, they use the strategies necessary to understand and reflect what they read.

The teacher takes on the role of facilitator, observing and taking part in the groups as necessary. In this setting the teacher can monitor student performance and adjust instruction according to the needs of the students. In the beginning stages of reciprocal teaching, the teacher introduces the four strategies and teaches each one separately, one each day. It is important to teach not only what the strategies are and how to use them but also why we use them. Each of these strategies is a "lifskill" - a skill we will always need to be successful. The teacher models for a small group or the whole class what reading looks like. For most students who struggle with understanding, reading looks like word-calling. They seem to be unaware that reading is more than saying words. Many students read with expression and feeling, and many read with great fluency. However, this does not lead to comprehension, and it is critical that we help students see all that reading really is.

Reciprocal teaching provides a cost effective process for helping students become life-long learners through a process that every teacher can model. It is like stepping out of your skin and showing students what you do as a

reader. We, like students, use these four strategies all the time. When we read independent level material, whether efferent or aesthetic, we use these strategies unconsciously. But when reading difficult or unfamiliar material, we access these strategies in a conscientious manner (Carrell & Devine & Eskey, 1988).

Research shows that we learn by talking about what we read and teaching what we know to others. In the scaffolded setting of collaborative groups, students read together, make meaning together, and teach each other what they know. They develop a respect for each others' strengths and patience for each others' weaknesses. Each student builds self confidence as a reader and a learner. In this collaborative setting, students are not afraid to say they don't know and to seek help from members of the group or outside sources. Reciprocal teaching works because it's what good readers do.

Focus on the reader

Good readers are active readers. From the outset they have clear goals in mind for their reading. They constantly evaluate whether the text, and their reading of it, is meeting their goals. Good readers typically look over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals. As they read, good readers frequently make predictions about what is to come. They read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading - what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what not to read, what to re-read, and so on. Good readers construct, revise, and question the meanings they make as they read. They draw upon, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text. They think about the authors of the text, their style, beliefs, intentions, historical milieu, and so on. They monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary. Good readers try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text, and deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed. They evaluate the text's quality and value, and react to the text in a range of ways, both intellectual and emotional. Good readers read different kinds of text differently. For example, when reading narrative, good readers attend closely to the setting and characters; when reading expository text these readers frequently construct and revise summaries of what they have read. For good readers, text processing occurs not only during 'reading' as we have traditionally defined it, but also during short breaks taken during reading, and even after the 'reading' itself has commenced. Comprehension is a consuming and complex activity, one that, for good readers, is typically both satisfying and productive (Gill, 1969).

A great deal of time spent actually reading: As with decoding, all the explicit instruction in the world will not make strong readers unless accompanied by lots of experience applying their knowledge, skills, and strategies during actual reading. Experience reading real texts for real reasons. In order to become strong, flexible, and devoted comprehenders of text, students need experience reading texts beyond those designed solely for reading instruction, and experience reading text with a clear and compelling purpose in mind.

Focus on the text

Experience reading at least the range of text genres that we wish students to comprehend. Students will not learn to become excellent comprehenders of

any given type of text without substantial experience reading and writing it. Thus, for example, all the experience in the world reading storybooks will not, by itself, enable a student to read, understand, and critique procedural forms of text of the sort found in how to books, instructions manuals, and the like. An environment rich in vocabulary and concept development, through reading, experience, and, above all, discussion of words and their meanings. Any text comprehension depends on some relevant prior knowledge. To some degree, well-chosen texts can, in themselves, build readers' knowledgebase. At the same time, hands-on activities, excursions, conversations, and other experiences are also needed to develop vocabulary and concept knowledge required to understand a given text. The model of comprehension instruction we view as best supported by research actually does more than simply balance instruction in specific comprehension strategies and opportunities to read, write, and discuss texts - it connects and integrates these different learning opportunities.

Specifically, we suggest an instructional model including the following four components:

1. *Think Aloud*. Another proven instructional technique for improving comprehension is known as think aloud. As its name implies, think aloud involves making one's thoughts audible and, usually, public-saying what you're thinking while you are performing a task, in this case, reading. Think aloud has been shown to improve students' comprehension both when students themselves engage in the practice during reading and also when teachers routinely think aloud while reading to students. Both teacher and student uses of think-aloud have been shown to improve students' comprehension.
2. *Teacher think aloud*. Teacher think aloud is typically conceived of as a form of teacher modeling. By thinking aloud, teachers demonstrate effective comprehension strategies and, at least as importantly, when and when not to apply them.
3. *Realias*. There is an old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. When it comes to comprehension, it might be paraphrased as, a visual display helps readers understand, organize, and remember some of those thousand words.
4. *Summarization*. Teaching students to summarize what they read is another way to improve their overall comprehension of text.

Often confused with determining importance, summarizing is a broader, more synthetic activity for which determining importance is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. The ability to summarize information requires readers to sift through large units of text, differentiate important from unimportant ideas, and then synthesize those ideas and create a new coherent text that stands for, by substantive criteria, the original. This sounds difficult, and the research demonstrates that, in fact, it is. Indeed, most people with relevant experience will agree that summarizing is a difficult task for many children. Many students require instruction and practice in summarizing before they are able to produce good oral and written summaries of text. Interestingly, research suggests that instruction and practice in summarizing not only improves students' ability to summarize text, but also their overall comprehension of text content. Thus, instruction in summarization can be considered to meet dual purposes: to improve students' ability to summarize text and to improve their ability to comprehend text and recall. There are some rules that students should keep in mind when trying to summarize a text:

- ❖ Rule 1: Delete unnecessary material.
- ❖ Rule 2: Delete redundant material.
- ❖ Rule 3: Compose a word to replace a list of items.
- ❖ Rule 4: Compose a word to replace individual parts of an action.
- ❖ Rule 5: Select a topic sentence.
- ❖ Rule 6: Invent a topic sentence if one is not available.

Through teacher modeling, group and individual practice, students learn to apply these rules to create brief summaries of text. Other approaches to summarizing text are more holistic. One that has been the subject of research is the GIST procedure (Cunningham, 1990). In GIST, students create summaries of fifteen or fewer words for increasingly large amounts of paragraph. As Cunningham describes it, GIST is conducted first as a whole class, then in small groups, and finally on an individual basis.

No comprehension activity has a longer nor a more pervasive tradition than asking students questions about their reading, whether this occurs before, during, or after the reading. We also know a great deal about the effect of asking different types of questions on students' understanding and recall of text, with the overall finding that students' understanding and recall can be readily shaped by the types of questions they become accustomed to. Thus if students get a steady diet of factual detail questions, they tend, in future encounters with text, to focus their efforts on factual details. If recall of details is what teachers desire, then there is a clear pathway to shaping that behaviour. If, by contrast, more general or more inferential understanding is desired, then teachers will be wise to emphasize questions that provide exactly that focus. When students experience a steady diet of questions requiring them to connect information in the text to their knowledgebase, they will tend to focus on this more integrative behaviour in the future (Goodman, 1984).

While the impact of questions on comprehension is important, for our purposes, in a chapter devoted to teaching comprehension strategies, the more interesting questions are

- a) whether students can learn to generate their own questions of text and
- b) what impact this more generative behavior might have on subsequent

comprehension. The research on engaging students in the process of generating questions about the texts they read, while not definitive, is on the whole, positive and encouraging.

Focus on classroom reading procedures

Here is some good advice I have been following in my teaching career how to make classroom reading procedures effective and successful for the students.

Maintain a relaxed classroom atmosphere - Having a relaxed working environment. Relaxed atmosphere is a prerequisite for production of any kind. We know through medical science that stress retards and, in some cases, completely blocks the learning process. Here are a few things that I have done to create a relaxed class:

1. At the beginning of the course, I have used a questionnaire to find out my students' interests, their attitude to the subject and their attitude towards each other and peers.

2. In addition, at the beginning of the course, I make students aware of my expectations. Making them aware of my expectations minimizes fear and confusion.
3. I constantly reward positive behaviour and remember to comment favourably on personal appearance (A little praise yields great dividends).
4. I try not to 'put anyone on the spot'. This is easy to do when you keep in mind that there are different types of learners and different methods of producing the same results.
5. Make time for SSR (Sustained Silent Reading). The SSR method presumes that the more students read, the better readers they will become. In addition, if they can choose books, magazines, etc. that they are interested in, and if they are shown how to create time for reading, then they will read more. With the SSR method, you set aside a specific time for individualized silent reading. Have each child bring a magazine, newspaper or book that he is interested in so that he can read during the allotted time. You, as the teacher, should also read during this time to set the correct role model.
6. Provide a classroom environment that is conducive to reading. To do this, teachers can put up posters and sayings about reading, pictures of authors and of people reading, so that students can see the act of reading as something people like to do. In addition, using the interest questionnaire done at the beginning of the year, teachers can provide a variety of magazines (past issues) for browsing etc.
7. Make your own readalong tapes. With the help of some of your better students, tape excerpts from novels etc, then have low students read along with the tapes. This method works well with young and old alike and it has even been successful for those who have had no formal reading training. As an alternative to teacher-made tapes, you can have students make their own tapes. To do this, the student would tape any experience that has made an impact on him. The teacher writes it out and gives it back to him as his reading assignment. The student then reads this along with the narration from the tape. This motivational technique is effective with any age group, and last but not least, it improves their listening skills at the same time.

Analysis of sample reading comprehension tasks

I am going to introduce four samples of reading comprehension tasks I have done with my student. This class is an adult class of 18 students and they are preparing for an intermediate international language exam of English, which is due in November, this year. International language exams generally contain a considerable number of reading comprehension tasks of different kinds. We have already been working together with my present class for three months, and they regularly get reading comprehension tasks either from the textbook or from supplementary material I have selected from other sources. In recent weeks they were also given special exam tasks, which might occur at their exam. My analysis will be based on the difficulty of the tasks, their attitude towards the tasks, and the evaluation of them.

Analysis based on the difficulty of the tasks. The four samples of reading comprehension tasks are difficult because they are normally loaded with unfamiliar and low frequency words that are not normally used in everyday conversations.

Reading comprehension. It is called "reading for gist", considered to be a skimming exercise, and the task is to "Read the five texts, items 1-5. Then read the headlines a-j. Decide which headline a-j goes best with which text..." You will find attached two samples of this kind. On the first page are ten headlines and on the second are five extracts of articles to match. The most terrifying for students is that both the extracts and headlines contain a lot of unknown words and they are often grammatically incorrect (especially the headlines). Another obstacle in matching the right article with the title is that these texts are rather authentic, and although I always try to give them as authentic material as I can, they still feel uneasy when they meet fragmented sentences, like "Actor Killed in his Home", and they asked if it was in the Passive Voice or not. I could only reply that it was obviously, and encourage them to get rid of the viewing a sentence exclusively from the grammatical aspect. As soon as they overcome this problem they will manage to do the task without any mistakes.

Reading comprehension is called "reading for details", considered to be an intensive exercise, and the task is to "Read the following text, then choose the to question 6-10 and mark your answer – a, b or c..." This task is not unusual or strange for most of the students, as this type of exercise to check reading comprehension is frequently used in textbooks. However, the topic might be hard for those students who cannot use predicting and who do not have enough background knowledge of the given topic. I regularly remind them not to count on only the text, but use their own mind and think before deciding on which answer is the best. Sometimes topics are far-fetched and they might not raise the interest of the students, but before handing out the sheets I always try to speak a little about the topic, so that they might guess and get used to it. Even so, I have to admit that sometimes there is only a minor difference between the answers, and if students do not learn the English way of thinking, they will not survive.

Reading comprehension is called "selective reading", and scanning strategy is to be used. The task is "Read questions 11-20 and then read the advertisements a-l. In which of the advertisements can you find what you are looking for? For each of the items 11-20, decide which advertisement goes with the situation described..." This type of reading comprehension is not particularly difficult, but requires a lot of patience from the readers' side, so it is a little 'playing with your nerves', but if students take the trouble, they can match the appropriate pairs. Besides, it is quite useful and lifelike, ie. a foreigner may need the help of newspaper advertisements to choose the desired programme for the evening, and it is not all the same when it starts or where it takes place. So with the help of this task students might even learn how to put their English knowledge into real life situations.

Analysis based on students' attitude

Students' attitude towards a particular reading comprehension task depends on their age, their level, and their general attitude towards learning English. I have noticed that students who learn English merely out of obligation, they have problems with all the tasks and try to avoid doing them by any chance. Other students' attitude, however, depends on their previous studies and their style and spirit influenced them while learning the basics of the language. I mainly teach intermediate students, so I meet a number of adults, who simply cannot split up with chopping the texts into sentences and translate them word by word, and who cannot break up with the grammar translation method. I actually think there is no point bothering about

unfamiliar words and getting stuck with a single sentence that we cannot make out as precisely as we would do in our mother tongue.

Reading comprehension. Students' attitude towards this task is rather variable, since some of them think that it does not test the real comprehension of the text, but rather their ability to associate ideas. It can be true, but I always try to convince them that pure grammar tests are not useful in everyday life, and they are not challenging enough, either. My experience is that younger students, who tend to 'take things easy', really enjoy that type of reading comprehension while others get nervous and frustrated.

The general attitude is relatively good, although they are still trapped in wanting to translate the text and become helpless when coming across a word they have never met during their former studies. Nevertheless, I think it could be overcome with an adequate amount of practice and with raising their interest in the particular material.

When doing this exercise, the group is often divided into two extremes, there are students who feel like doing it because they find it easy and they manage to find the matching items quickly. The other camp of struggling students dislike it very much, as they do not have the patience to assemble them, or they are not attentive enough and precise, so they fail to choose the right advertisement, which makes them angry because they are aware of the fact that it is simply out of carelessness, however it creates negative attitude towards the exercise.

Evaluation of the sample reading comprehension

Students' scores will be indicated in the following tables:

Table 1: Reading comprehension, Sample 1

Mistakes	Students' scores
No mistakes	5
One mistake	9
Two mistakes	2
Three mistakes	1
Four mistakes	1
Five mistakes	0

Table 2: Reading comprehension, Sample 2

Mistakes	Students' scores
No mistakes	8
One mistake	5
Two mistakes	3
Three mistakes	1
Four mistakes	1
Five mistakes	0

Table 3: Reading comprehension

Mistakes	Students' scores
No mistakes	5
One mistake	4
Two mistakes	5
Three mistakes	2
Four mistakes	0
Five mistakes	2 (These students ran out of time)

Table 4: Reading comprehension

Mistakes	Students' scores
No mistakes	15
One mistake	2
Two mistakes	1
Three mistakes	0
Four mistakes	0
Five mistakes	0
Six mistakes	0
Seven mistakes	0
Eight mistakes	0
Nine mistakes	0
Ten mistakes	0

Reading comprehension as part of an exam

The reading comprehension types that have already been presented are all parts of an international exam, known as TELC, short for The European Language Certificates. The two main characteristic features of The European Language Certificates examination are test papers based on language tasks formulated in a clear and understandable way and standardized marking criteria applied in an objective way. The comprehensively defined test specifications and uniform marking criteria ensure that these features apply to all examinations and are identical for all languages covered by TELC. This examination consists of a Written, a Listening, a Letter-writing, and an Oral part, which altogether count 300 hundred points. The written part contains the above mentioned three types of reading comprehension parts, and as each means 25 points, 70 points are not to be ignored, so it proves that besides learning English for its own sake, it has a practical and exam-oriented aspect, which is very important for the learners.

Error correction in teaching reading is rather difficult, and almost only relevant if we think of reading aloud, ie. intensive reading. Errors are the products of learning, so they should be regarded as the natural part of the reading process. Learning will always involve making mistakes, and it depends on the kind of exercise which are to be corrected and when. In the case of reading aloud, it is still questionable, whether these should be corrected immediately, so we would risk breaking the flow of fluency reading, or at the end, but then it is not sure that the reader remembers the mistake, and correction loses its effect. However, it is worth asking another student to give feedback at the end and count the pronunciation mistakes. It often happens that students read "I" instead of "It", mainly at the beginning of a sentence, and it can be really annoying, but 80% percent it is only a slip of the tongue and it does not affect meaning and understanding the text. For a teacher it is quite hard not to interrupt a student when noticing a mistake,

but I always try to judge if it is a result of misunderstanding, or just because of being nervy or wanting to read more quickly than the tongue could follow.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, I would like to give a list of questions which can help teachers evaluate their own efforts in teaching reading in a class where students learn English as a foreign language. If you answer these questions honestly, you will feel which are the areas you need to compensate for, and which are those you are satisfied with during your English lessons centered around reading comprehension tasks.

Questions about the overall reading program:

- How much time do students spend actually reading?
- How much reading do students routinely do in texts other than those written solely for reading or content area instruction?
- Do students have clear and compelling purposes in mind when reading?
- How many different genres are available to students within your classroom?
- How many students read across genres?
- Do students have multiple opportunities to develop vocabulary and concept knowledge through texts?
- Through discussion of new ideas?
- Through direct instruction in vocabulary and concepts?
- Are students given substantial instruction in the accurate and automatic decoding of words?
- How much time do students spend writing texts for others to comprehend?
- With reading-writing connections emphasized?
- Are students afforded an environment rich in high-quality talk about text?

About comprehension strategy instruction:

- Are students taught to...
- identify their purpose for reading?
 - preview texts before reading?
 - make predictions before and during reading?
 - activate relevant background knowledge for reading?
 - think aloud while reading?
 - use text structure to support comprehension?
 - create visual representations to aid comprehension and recall?
 - determine the important ideas in what they read?
 - summarize what they read?
 - generate questions for text?
 - handle unfamiliar words during reading?
 - monitor their comprehension during reading?

Does instruction about these strategies include:

- an explicit description of the strategy and when it should be used?
- modeling of the strategy in action?
- collaborative use of the strategy in action?
- guided practice using the strategy, with gradual release of responsibility?
- independent practice using the strategy?
- Are the texts used for instruction carefully chosen to match the strategy and students being taught?
- Are students' comprehension skills assessed on an ongoing basis?

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