

**FUNDAMENTAL FACETS CONVOLUTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING
SKILLS – A GLANCE**

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Abstract

Reading is a multifaceted, complex skill made up of a number of psychological, physical, and social elements. Just as there are many sides to knowing a language, so there are many aspects to effective, mature reading unfortunately, in language pedagogy, too little attention is devoted to this skill. Too often language teachers have no opportunity to obtain even an overview of the vast amount of research that has been done on the reading process. The purpose of this article is to summarize some current understandings about the nature of reading and make them accessible to language teachers. Talk about communicative competence, which fills the air, has eclipsed attention to the competence required for reading well in a new language. Perhaps in reaction to its apparent association with the “old-fashioned” grammar translation method, language teachers have turned away from the reading skill. But today, especially in language programs designed to meet specific needs, many teachers realize that the skill students need most is reading. When compare even third and fourth-year English text books with unedited reading material in this language, we begin to realize the scope of the problem. Few students, even after years of study, are able to read English easily. The vocabulary and syntax of news magazines, novels nonfiction books seem quite beyond the reach of most students ;yet these are the materials teachers want their students to read for the purpose of learning, let alone for pleasure and enjoyment. By all measures, reading would seem to be the most attainable language skill for students in countries where English is not widely spoken while it is almost impossible to achieve fluency in speaking without the opportunity to practice frequently with native speaker, an author will wait while the reader looks up a new word here and there.

Key words : Reading, comprehensive reading, Micro reading, reading skills

The fact that reading competence in a new language is an achievable goal should encourage teachers to turn their attention to developing reading programs that will help students move from controlled, contrived textbook prose in to reading material that they select for themselves, according to their own interests and curiosity about the world. With a

better understanding of the nature of the reading process, of mature reading strategies, and of what a reading-skill program should include, language teachers will be able to choose materials and activities that capitalize on their students' interests.

THREE BASIC METHODS

The use of graphic symbols to represent meaning is a relatively recent invention in man's history. If the development of the human species were plotted along a time-line representing a single year we would find that mechanical printing began only a few minutes ago. (...)But in technological societies today a person without reading competence is severely limited ; literacy widely regarded as an essential tool for learning .

Learning to read is a process associated primarily with instruction in a student's first language; however, language teachers in adult literacy and some bilingual programs must have an understanding of the early , code-breaking, stage of reading. Discussions of methods to use in the earliest stage of reading instruction in countries like the United States are numerous, and there is no striking evidence in favor of one approach over another. Each of the various methods, in what is sometimes called "the great debate," has its strong adherents.

The methods most widely used are (1)phonics, that is instruction in the correspondence between English letters and sounds (also known as the "linguistic approach," particularly when the analysis of letter combinations and sounds is more precise); (2)whole –word reading, which involves recognition of single words representing objects or concepts well understood by the learners, and then moves into word groups; and (3) the language-experience approach, in which learners tell a brief story, or give a description or a comment, the teacher writes down the language they use, and the learners then read the language they have spoken. Success, along with failures, seem to occur with all three approaches, as well as with combinations of them. Although there is no clear-cut evidence for one beginning-reading method over another, it has been noted that when children do grasp the knack of reading, the same basic elements are present-the three m's of success in learning to read .

Maturation, motivation, and meaning

First, a level of cognitive maturation must be reached before a child is ready to read , although the age may vary widely. (The first m of learning to read may also stand for mystery. Since no one really knows anything about what it is that triggers a child's grasp of

the idea behind reading.) second, motivation must be present; reading specialists point out the benefits of a rich reading environment, one in which other family members read and in which there are ample materials to read. The third m is meaning: the child must know, in terms of real world experience, the content of the reading, or at least a good deal of it. After the child has broken the code, his reading skill should develop along with his cognitive abilities, if the three m's of normal maturation (or growth) motivation, and meaning are present.

The third m, meaning, is particularly important for language teachers, who too often observe students reading word by word, trying to get meaning from individual words rather than from longer stretches of print. Reading specialists maintain that to become a mature reader it is necessary to move beyond deciphering letters and individual words, towards getting meaning from the printed page directly without decoding into spoken language.

What is mature reading?

Psycholinguistic descriptions of the reading process emphasize the need for active participation. This is in direct contrast to the old familiar notion of reading as a receptive skill. Following are three quotations from scholars concerned with reading in a second or foreign language, all of which stress that active interaction must take place between the writer of the text and the reader.

Reading is a long- distance discussion between a reader and an author There is an essential interaction between language and thought in reading ...the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought (Goodman 1968). Reading is not a reaction to a text, but an interaction between writer and reader mediated through the textreading efficiency is a matter of how effective a discourse the reader can create from the text, either in terms of rapport with the writer or in terms of his purpose in engaging in the discourse in the first place .(Widdowson 1979). Reading is ... an active process, in which the reader must make an active contribution by drawing upon and using concurrently various abilities he has acquired .(Wardhaugh 1969)

WHAT ARE MATURE READING STRATEGIES?

Significant research has been directed toward identifying the strategies or techniques used by people who read well. Such strategies –which are numerous- seem to group themselves around the following core ideas ;

1. Adjusting Attention according to the material. Not all reading matter is the same ; different types of material require different reading modes. Some selections should be read quickly without bothering about details ; others require careful deliberate attention. Good readers continually shift and adjust their attention according to the nature of the reading matter as well as their objectives.
2. Using the Total context as an Aid to Comprehension. The meaning of a selection lies not only in those pages on which it appears, but in the total context of the book or periodical. Good readers use all of the front matter (the table of contents , title page ,etc) as well as the chapter and section headings , as quick aids to comprehension. In news paper reading , for example, the position of an article in the paper (e.g. whether it appears in the news section or editorial pages) adds to the total context and provides information that helps to understand it.
3. Skimming . Reading quickly to get an overall idea of the subject matter of a selection is called skimming. The first, quick reading can be for the purpose of finding the main ideas of paragraph or larger chunks of print. News paper writing lends itself to skimming , since the main ideas are contained in the lead paragraph ; after the lead, everything else is details. Mature readers use the technique of skimming with all kinds of materials to determine whether an item deserves further attention.
4. Search reading. A more attentive approach than skimming search reading is usually appropriate for expository prose. The reader makes use of key words or groups of synonymous words and expressions which the author has utilized to avoid the fault of repeating the same word too often. The reader looks for repeated elements of all kinds that present no new ideas or themes. For example, much expository writing in popular journals contains elaborations in which the writer piles up many examples to illustrate a few main ideas. These are the passages to skip over quickly.
5. Predicting./Guessing / Anticipating. These three words describe what good readers do as their eyes quickly go down a page of print, picking up meaning in bunches, so to speak. On the word level, the reader guesses the meaning of unfamiliar words by using the context. On the syntactic level he/she uses what he/she knows about the form of the language to extract meaning without actually reading all the words. The idea of a dialogue between author and reader is part of the process of predicting and anticipating. The reader tends to anticipate the author's words before he/she encounters them on the page.

6. Critical Reading. A more sophisticated form of predicting is reading critically, or reading “between the lines” by looking for the meaning behind the authors’ words. This involves strategies such as looking for inference, implication, tone of voice, etc.
7. Receptive Reading. Careful reading is called for when the reader needs to use the information typically in a learning situation. In this kind of reading, associated primarily with information-dense material, the reader gives attention to the supporting ideas that back up arguments and uses such strategies as reading paragraph by paragraph. Summarizing the main ideas of each paragraph underlining making notes in the margin about questions to ask later, and writing a summary after reading in order to retain the material or make it his/her own.
8. Scanning. A strategy distinct from skimming, although sometimes confused with it, scanning involves looking for particular information usually facts that one has read recently. One scans the pages of a newspaper to find a particular article. One scans the pages of a telephone directory or the index of a book looking for a particular item.
9. Using Textual-Discourse Device. Effective readers make use of all the syntactic and rhetorical features the author has provided. Textual-discourse devices provide unity or coherence to a piece of writing. In narrative writing, for example, unity comes from a sequence of events set out in chronological order. In expository writing, unity is achieved through the words and phrases the writer employs to connect the ideas in sentences, paragraphs and larger segments. The good reader makes use of this prescription to writers; “Tell the reader what you are going to say, say it, then tell him what you have said”.
10. Synthesizing knowledge. The most elusive, but probably most crucial, strategy is making use of previous knowledge. Even for extremely proficient readers, it is a tedious, difficult task to read about totally unfamiliar subject matter. In all reading one should bring to the activity all of one’s cultural knowledge and experience in the real world, to get sense from the printed page.

WHAT SHOULD A FOREIGN- OR SECOND-LANGUAGE READING-SKILL PROGRAM PROVIDE?

Although the path from research output to class room application is never direct, suggestions for a sound reading program can be drawn from what is known about the nature of the reading process and the strategies that effective readers use. At the same time,

research traditionally associated with foreign and second- language reading programs can be measured.

Perhaps most importantly, a reading program should give attention to the skill of reading alone and for its own sake. Practices such as having individuals read aloud, or choral reading in which the class reads aloud following the teacher's model, are questionable ways to teach the reading skill. Such activities do offer opportunities for oral practice, and teachers should view them as such, and not mix oral work with reading, since effective reading occurs without reference to the sounds of language. A solid reading program should teach strategies explicitly through intensive reading lessons appropriate to the developmental level of the students. For example, in when reading is first introduced as a separate skill, attention should be given to word- attack activities such as finding word groups and phrases, guessing new words from local context clues, and finding main and supporting ideas.

Learners should be encouraged to use guessing and predicting strategies when they read, and teachers should support them in this activity. The teacher can increase the students' motivation to read a difficult selection by providing background information through an overview of the contents. It is more important for a selection to come close to the learners' interest and concerns than to suit the teachers' taste. As much as possible, learners should read about facts events, and ideas with which they are already familiar through their everyday lives. Another important activity of the reading program is "reading at the drop of a pin". Since reading primarily an individual activity the teacher should provide a quiet time when individual reading is the primary activity. The teacher as well as the students should remain quiet during the silent reading period. Talking about the content of the selection can disturb the concentration of the students.

CONCLUSION

What good reading teachers do, although vitally important, is therefore not teaching in the usual sense of that deceptive little word .instead, they create good learning environments for particular classes by stimulating interest, selecting and adapting appropriate materials, prompting useful strategies, and providing each student with feedback a s needed. With this kind of instruction, I firmly believe that most of our students can learn to read, and at the same time read to learn, in English or in any other language of their choice.

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