



make literacy meaningful

Reading Comprehension: Reflective Lesson Planning

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Dublin, Ireland, 2019

Introduction

Reading comprehension is the ability to engage with, understand and extract meaning from text displayed on paper, screens or other surfaces. Combining reading with thinking and reasoning, it is influenced by the reader's skills and ability to process information. Language acquisition and skills are critical as is the reader's conceptual knowledge, previous reading and personal experience.

Careful lesson planning is required to develop students' reading comprehension skills and to ensure that all of the challenges they face are addressed in a systematic way. Strategies that provide specific instructions for developing and retaining comprehension skills, with intermittent feedback from the teacher on the student's progress, have been found to improve reading comprehension across all ages, especially those affected by learning disabilities. Overt phonemic awareness, summarizing, predicting, connecting, inferring, asking questions, answering questions, analysing, critiquing, comprehension monitoring, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning are all effective strategies (PDST, 2019). However, it is best to combine multiple reading comprehension and language acquisition strategies, which making reading an active, observable process.

Practising in a professional manner requires regular reflection upon practice (CECDE, 2006). Planning and reflection are essential elements in supporting students' reading comprehension and ensuring that there is continuity and progression in their learning. It also enables you to reflect on and develop your teaching skills.

This reflective lesson planning paper aims to enable you to create your own reflective reading comprehension lesson plans. It is part of the Making Literacy Meaningful project, funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ Programme, which is developing practically-oriented knowledge in the area of language and literacy development, with a specific focus on addressing the needs, challenges and opportunities resulting from multilingual and multicultural classrooms. More information is provided in our MOOCs <http://literacymooc.eu/lessons/reading-comprehension/> and website <http://euliteracy.eu/>.

Section 1 outlines how you can plan a reading comprehension lesson using a reflective explicit teaching approach. This will require you to think carefully about your students; their language, thinking and comprehension abilities; the activities needed to support their learning and how you will facilitate the different elements of the lesson. It will also enable you to incorporate new ideas from the MOOC or other reading or courses you might be doing. This is followed by a list of reading comprehension learning activities and a sample lesson plan.

Teaching Reading Comprehension: Reflection and Planning

Reflective practice (Schön, 1983) helps you grow as a professional through improving your teaching practices and understanding of educational theories. It also ensures that you are meeting your students' learning needs. Explicit teaching techniques are most effective for comprehension strategy instruction. These techniques involve using highly structured and sequenced steps to teach a specific skill. Lesson planning is an essential. In explicit instruction, teachers tell their students why and when they should use specific reading comprehension strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include direct explanation, teacher modelling ("thinking aloud"), guided practice, and application.

Here are the steps to follow in planning any reading comprehension lesson. It is very much a non-didactic open-ended process that enables you, as the expert in your classroom, to be creative and innovative in your methodology and content. It will also allow you to incorporate the learning needs, interests and cultures into your lessons.

- Reflect on the various issues that arise for you in supporting your students' reading comprehension. List the approaches that you think would work well for you as teacher. Why do you think these will work? What are the challenges involved and how could you address them?
- Choose one or two strategies, which you think would work for you with your students. Having considered what you hope to achieve with these strategies, list your goals, expected outcomes and success criteria. Check that the key elements of reading comprehension as outlined in the MOOC (<http://literacymooc.eu/lessons/reading-comprehension/>) are included.
- Having prioritised one or two strategies, devise a lesson plan to implement them. The learning opportunities, both home and school-based, along with the relevant resources required to implement these opportunities, should be detailed. Follow-up learning activities and assessment techniques also need to be included.
- Having drawn up your plan, reflect again on what you are hoping to achieve. Check that it is realistic considering the context in which you work, your students' abilities and the time available to you. Revise your plan if necessary.
- Implement your plan. The lesson should begin with an explanation of the learning objectives to the students, and a demonstration of the learning strategy by direct teaching and modelling. As the lesson progresses, you need to check for understanding. Allow time for the students to practise and apply the strategy while you provide explicit

feedback and reviews. At the end of the lesson, revisit what was covered and outline opportunities for further independent practice, whether at home or in school.

- Evaluate your lesson delivery and plan. After the lesson reflect on how it went. What worked well? What did not work well and needs to be changed? Consider if you are still on track to achieve your learning goals and outcomes. If not, what changes are needed to both the plan and the next lesson?
- Re-read your plan and reflections. List the main things you have learnt from implementing the plan. Compare your learning with the theories outlined in the MOOC lesson on reading comprehension (<http://literacymooc.eu/lessons/reading-comprehension/>). Record if and how your thinking, theories and practices have changed.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

Here are a few strategies, including explicit instruction, for teaching reading comprehension and for providing your students with opportunities in which to practice their skills. Much, if not most, of children's learning takes place in the home, in sports clubs, and in the wider community (Illich, 1973; Bourdieu and & De Saint-Martin, 1974). Non-structured activities such as family outings, events, and holidays, all contribute to children's learning (Bleach, 2019). Therefore, you need to consider how to involve your students' families in developing the students' reading comprehension strategies and skills.

1. **Explicit teaching techniques** (PDST, 2019) are most effective for comprehension strategy instruction. In explicit instruction, teachers tell readers why and when they should use specific reading comprehension strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include direct explanation, teacher modelling ("thinking aloud"), guided practice, and application.
 - a. Direct explanation: explain why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy.
 - b. Modelling: model, or demonstrate, how to apply the strategy, usually by "thinking aloud" while reading the text that the students are using. It consists of the teacher demonstrating a task for students and describing exactly what is being done as it is being done.
 - c. Guided practice: guide and assist students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy. It allows the students to practice using the technique and to consolidate their understanding through group work.
 - d. Application: help students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently. Independent practice is an important part of this stage as it provides students with learning opportunities to consolidate and master the target skills. It also identifies any students who may be in need of some additional support.
2. **Reciprocal teaching** (Sullivan Palincsar and Brown 1984) is where the teacher and students take turns leading a dialogue on the pertinent features of the text. It involves 'thinking aloud' and questioning, wondering, remembering, summarising, solving,

creating, evaluating and judging a piece of text e.g. I wonder why? What will happen next? Visualization can also be used in these teacher-student dialogues. It involves creating a mental image to bring the words and text to life. Asking sensory questions e.g. How does it feel? Imagine.... Put yourself in.... will help students become better visualizers. Students can practice visualizing by imagining what they "see, hear, smell, taste, or feel" when they hear words. They can share their visualizations, then check their level of detail and understanding against the illustrations and text

3. **Cooperative learning** (Jacobs 2004) involves students working together as partners or in small groups on clearly defined tasks. It can be used to develop students' reading comprehension by organising and teaching students to work together to understand texts, help each other learn and apply comprehension strategies. There are many ways this can be organised but the basic technique is that the pupils and their book buddies come together to discuss and read a book. They can all read the same text or each choose their own. The following is just one example of cooperative learning and reading.
 - a. Each member of the group introduces him or herself and the text s/he is going to read. S/he explains why s/he is interested in reading this text.
 - b. Everyone reads their text and writes down questions for their partner.
 - c. They swap texts, read them out loud to one another and ask one another questions about the text they read.
 - d. Each member of the group thanks the others for listening to them and mentions one thing that they have learnt from the session.
4. Multiple, meaningful exposure to a **variety of text and genre, both fiction and non-fiction** (PDST, 2019), where students gets lots of opportunities to practice their reading comprehension skills independently. Make sure to link them to language acquisition lessons with lots of opportunities for discussion, interviews, debates, either in large or small group or 1-1 on pieces of text. Encourage probing questions about the text and its connections with other interesting topics and events. Reading and editing their own and other students' writing is a great opportunity to develop and teach individual reading comprehension strategies. Text and genre can include:
 - **Expository Writing:** Text books, How-to articles, recipes, news stories, business, technical, or scientific writing.
 - **Descriptive Writing:** Poetry, journal or diary writing, nature writing, descriptive passages in fiction
 - **Persuasive Writing:** Opinion and editorial newspaper pieces, advertisements, reviews (of books, music, movie, restaurants, etc.), letters
 - **Narrative Writing:** Novels, short stories, poetry, autobiographies, biographies, anecdotes

- **Genres:** Adventure, mystery, science fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, play scripts, myths, legends fairy tales, fables, traditional tales
 - **Texts:** Posters, forms, books, comics, online, digital, newspapers, leaflets, catalogues, multimedia technology
 - **General content knowledge** (Kozminsky and Kozminsky, 2001): current events, arts, history, geography, maths, science and other topics.
5. **Involve families** (Bleach, 2019) in developing your students' reading comprehension activities. Encourage them to
- a. Provide books, newspapers and other reading materials in their home
 - b. Model reading books and other texts for their children
 - c. Pick a topic, have a discussion about it and encourage the children to read more about it
 - d. Read to their children daily, talking time to ask questions and discuss the text
 - e. Take their children to the library regularly
 - f. Continue to use their home language with their children, particularly If the home language is not that of the language of instruction. Provide their children with a variety of reading materials in their home language.

Sample Reading Comprehension Lesson Plan

It is important to remember that there is no one "best way" to plan or to teach. The lesson plan outlined below is just one example of how to teach a lesson. There are lots of sample lesson plans and teaching materials available on the internet. Here are some links that you may find be useful:

<http://literacymooc.eu/lessons/reading-comprehension/>

<https://www.scoilnet.ie/search/resource/entity/show/Lre/11876/>

<https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Reading%20Booklet%20-%20to%20circulate.pdf>

<https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Guiding%20Comprehension%20-%20Teaching%20for%20Meaning.pdf>

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/hits.aspx>

https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Literacy/LIT13_TeachingReadingComprehensionFINALDRAFT.pdf

<https://www.ldatschool.ca/explicit-instruction-a-teaching-strategy-in-reading-writing-and-mathematics-for-students-with-learning-disabilities/>

<http://singteach.nie.edu.sg/issue58-contributions02/>

<https://fcit.usf.edu/mathvids/strategies/em.html>

<https://www.k12reader.com/reading-comprehension-and-higher-order-thinking-skills/>

<p>Learning Activities:</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve comprehension vocabulary re: Climate change • Engage in personal reading • Perform simple information retrieval tasks • Read from a range of informative text, choosing material for reading during silent reading periods • Engage in conversation about • Learn how to ask and answer questions 	<p>My Reflections:</p> <p>What worked well? Why?</p> <p>What could be improved?</p> <p>Have I achieved my objectives? What do I need to do next?</p>
<p>Direct Explanation:</p> <p>Explain that you are going to talk about climate change today. Ask your students what they already know about climate change and what they would like to know.</p> <p>List key concepts and words you would like them to learn using pictures to aid understanding. You can find the key terms for climate change on this blog: https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/key-terms-you-need-understand-climate-change or on this website: https://www.vocabulary.com/lists/1544574</p> <p>Through modelling and discussion explicitly teach the students to recognise each word on sight and to understand its meaning.</p>	
<p>Guided Practice and Application</p> <p>Provide a variety of texts about climate change, which include the key words listed above or ask students to research the key word they are most interested in and would like to learn more about e.g. global warming, hydrosphere. Give the students an opportunity to read and interpret the text independently. Encourage them to use graphic organisers to record their thoughts. Provide encouragement and assistance to students as necessary.</p>	
<p>Teacher Modelling ("thinking aloud")</p> <p>Choose an article about climate change that you find interesting e.g. this piece from National Geographic Kids: https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/geography/general-geography/what-is-climate-change/.</p>	

<p>Read it aloud for the class. As each section starts with a question, stop before reading each paragraph to ask the open-ended questions: What? Why? When? Who? What can we do in the future? Each section is also accompanied by a photograph, which can also be discussed and analysed.</p> <p>The structure of the piece can also be discussed as it will help the students consider the thinking of the author and the need to adapt their writing for different audiences. The teacher can ask the following questions: Why did the author start each section with a question? Why did the author include photographs? Why were these particular photographs used? This was an article written for children. How did the writers take their audience into account? How would this article be written for adults? Compare articles written for children and adults. What are the similarities? What are the differences?</p>	
<p>Cooperative learning, guided practice and application</p> <p>In small groups of 4, ask each student to re-read their texts and graphic organisers on climate change. Each student in turn summarises what they have learnt for the others in the group. The groups then discuss and agree on the four most important facts about climate change they need to share with others. The then prepare a short 5-minute presentation, which can be in poster or PowerPoint format. Provide encouragement and assistance to students as necessary.</p>	
<p>Cooperative learning, guided practice and application</p> <p>Each group then presents their facts to the rest of class. When each group is finished their presentation, encourage the other students to ask them 1-2 questions about their presentation.</p>	
<p>Teacher Modelling ("Thinking Aloud")</p> <p>Finish the lesson with a short group reflection, using the following questions: How do you think the lesson went? What have you learnt? What else would you like to learn? How might we do that? Model for the student how to critique and analyse the lesson.</p>	
<p>Cooperative Home Learning and Application</p> <p>Let parents know that you are learning about climate change. Encourage them to discuss their thoughts on climate change, what they think should be done to address the issue and what,</p>	

<p>if anything, they are doing at home to prevent climate change. Parents can also encourage their children to read more on the topic by providing additional reading materials at home and through the local library. This will reinforce your students' reading comprehension skills as well as extending their vocabulary and general knowledge.</p>	
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