Reading Instruction

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Here is a definition of reading comprehension: "The process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language." (Block, Gambrell, Presley, 2002, pp. 23-24) It is not direct translation. Reading in a foreign language should be no different than reading in one's native language in regards to the approach taken. Readers should be supported to build upon what they know, and they should be supported to learn how to guess what they don't know.

When it comes to reading, there are three integral parts: the *reader*, the *text* and the *purpose*. Though it is obvious to say that vocabulary and grammar complexity influence the ease or difficulty of a text for a reader, the text type, the reader's background knowledge and the purpose also heavily influence the outcome of reading comprehension. For our students, imagine the difference between a textbook (*text*), a student (*reader*), and homework (*purpose*) versus a comic book (*text*), a teenager (*reader*) and pleasure (*purpose*). No matter the vocabulary or complexity, I propose that the latter defines a greater chance of reading comprehension. However, as teachers the former generally defines the reading context we face. In order to help our students succeed, break the reading process up into three parts: pre-reading, *during reading*, and *post-reading*.

Pre-Reading

Background knowledge, i.e., the knowledge each individual has based upon their individual history in life, is a source that should always be tapped into, especially before reading a text. Also, before reading, show the purpose for reading the text itself. Do this by asking students specific questions about the topic, have students create questions for other students based upon knowledge of what the text will be, show a picture and elicit students' background knowledge, show a picture and have students provide a title, have students draw a picture based upon a title or topic, or have students put parts of the text in correct order.

During Reading

While students read, it is important that they have a clear purpose when doing so. Teach students to check their comprehension of what they have read *as they read*. Have students predict what further information is yet to come. Lastly, have students highlight key areas or keywords pertaining to the purpose.

Post-Reading

A big mistake in reading instruction is to skip *post-reading*. *Post-reading* rewards the students for having given the effort to read the material. Without such a reward and chance for success, reading will become an unpopular task. Some ideas would be to have students answer the questions provided before reading, provide a new or alternative title, write an ending or a new ending, write what happens before the text begins, respond to the text in personal letter form or make a chart, table, graph or picture based upon information from the text.

Purpose

Read this example from Cambridge University Press: *Yesterday I saw the palgish flester golling begrunt the bruck.*

Question: What was the flester doing, and where?

Make sure the tasks (*purpose*) encourage selective reading to show understanding of the main meaning and not just test understanding of unimportant details. The above example shows that there is no need to *comprehend* the sentence in order to answer the question. Reading without meaning undermines the development of an effective reading process.