

Teaching Strategic Reading for CSL Learners: Further information and discussion

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Additional Information and Discussion

Reading Comprehension Strategies for CSL learners

1. *Identify the purpose in reading.* By doing so, you know what you are looking for and can weed out the less important information. If reading for the main idea, you can skim the text first. The first and last sentences of each paragraph and the first and last paragraph usually contain conclusive ideas of the text. If you are reading for specific information, such as names, dates, definition of a key concept, you can scan the text to extract specific information without reading through the whole text.

2. *Use semantic mapping or clustering.* The point of using semantic mapping or clustering is to prevent readers from becoming overwhelmed by a long string of ideas or facts. Readers can use graphic organizers to reorganize the information in their own way.

3. *Guess when you aren't certain.* An efficient reader doesn't need to recognize each character. Sometimes, recognizing every character does not necessarily result in comprehension. The understanding of culture or background information also plays a significant role in reading comprehension. Learners can use guessing to their advantage to do the following:

- Guess the meaning of a character
- Guess about a cultural reference
- Guess content messages
- Infer implied meaning

4. *Analyze characters.* The knowledge of character is significant for reading comprehension (Anderson, R.C., Freebody, P. 1981; Beck, Perfetti & Mckeown, 1982). One way for learners to make guessing pay off when they don't immediately recognize a word is to analyze it in terms of what they know about it.

- Look for the semantic radical (such as semantic radical “氵” which is usually associated with water) that may give clues.
- Look for grammatical contexts that may signal information
- Look at semantic context for clues

Classroom Techniques for CLS Reading Instruction

1. Language - Experience Approach

“The beauty of this approach is that the student provides the text, through dictation, that serves as the basis for reading instruction” (Peregoy, S., Boyle, O. & Cadiero-Kaplan, K., 2008: 297).

Language-Experience reading helps learners map from spoken Chinese to written Chinese and to

see reading and writing as purposeful communication about their own interests and needs. The following are the basic steps:

- Pair up students.
- Student A tells a story based on his/her own interest. Meanwhile, Student B writes down verbatim by dictation.
- Student A reads back the story.

Based on the basic steps of Language – Experience Approach, CSL teachers can adjust according to the real classroom situation. For example, handwriting Chinese characters are time consuming and hard for CLS learners. Typing Chinese on the computer might be a better way to do this activity. For the very beginning learner, narrative can be replaced by dialogue. For example, the teacher can give out a real-life situation, such as exchanging shoes in a store. One student plays the role of customer and one plays the role of salesman. While they are having a conversation, one of them types down the whole dialogue. The other one can read the whole dialogue. Later, they change their role and use this approach again.

2. Direct Reading - Thinking Activity (DR-TA)

By using DR-TA, the teacher invites predictions and confirmations on one portion of text at a time and then tells students how many paragraphs to read to find out whether their predictions are correct. For example, in the beginning the teacher can ask students to make a prediction of the main idea of this text by looking at the title. Do they have any prior knowledge about it? The teacher models two efficient reading comprehension strategies: guessing by the title and using background information. In this way, students gain experience in prediction and monitoring their comprehension as more mature readers do.

3. Retell stories by Guide Questions

Retelling is widely used in reading comprehension instruction. Retelling trains students to grasp the main idea of a text and reorganize it in their own way. However, for the beginning learner, the teacher can use some guide questions to help them retell. Learners first answer the given questions and then combine the answers into a paragraph. The retelling is completed! Gradually, learners can ask the guide questions mentally and retell a text without the written guide questions.

4. Reader's Theater

Reader's theater is an excellent activity for learners to respond to the reading. Learners read the story and dramatize a script from a story they have read. For teenagers and adult learners, they can videotape when they act out their script. The group activity involves students in meaningful and motivational reading activities. Teachers should select reading stories based on student's age, Chinese proficiency and interest.