

## PURPOSE SETTING IN READING COMPREHENSION

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### Abstract

Comprehension is the skill of extracting meaning from print. It is the use of prior knowledge without which, a complex object like a text would be difficult to interpret or would be meaningless. Comprehension is central to reading comprehension. The reason is that we read in order to obtain information, that is, comprehension or understanding. Therefore, reading comprehension involves the process, of understanding the idea expressed in the written or printed text. It involves getting meaning out of a written or printed text. This process of meaning making entails using both the text information and the information that the reader brings to the text. This brings an interaction between the reader and the text. A purpose for reading which is to get ideas or information behind the words, which the author wrote to convey meaning, must be set. This paper therefore, will examine purpose setting in reading comprehension.

### Introduction

The purpose of reading is to get the ideas or information behind the words. The author wrote his text in order to convey meaning. In order to obtain that meaning the reader must read purposefully.

According to Oyetunde (1986), purpose setting is one of the motivational techniques the teacher can employ to launch his students into meaningful reading. Odeyemi (1995), also said that, purposeful reading is done when

- the attitude to reading is that in which complete concentration is placed on the written or printed passages;
- flexible reading speed is adopted to suit the aims and texts being read;
- guide questions are provided and answered as the reading process goes on;
- memory enhancing devices are adopted to remember salient points or useful formulae which could easily trigger a recall of the facts already read;
- attention is paid to major points or facts rather than unnecessary details, and
- the trend of thought in the reading material is followed unwaveringly.

Purpose setting is guiding students as to be kinds of information they are to look for in a given passage. This means that before reading, students are made aware of the particular task they are expected to accomplish at the end of their reading. Perhaps the reason for this is obvious. We need for different objectives or purposes, and appropriate reading strategies need to be employed for these purposes. This is the reason Williams (1990), said that, reading strategies are by no means limited to exercises in the comprehension lesson practice in faster reading or even activities in supervised independent reading in class. It should be known according to him that there are a great number of different purposes for reading and this could be distinguished under two general purposes for reading -- light reading for pleasure and serious study of textual materials. Setting a purpose makes reading activities interesting and the assessment of achievement is made easier.

The centrality of comprehension in students reading achievement cannot be overemphasized. Although each reading programme has its specific objectives, they all have comprehension as the ultimate objective. According to Oyetunde (1986), "comprehension is why anyone reads." In order to buttress this fact, he quotes Quandt (1977:107), thus, "without comprehension, words are only a series of lifeless symbols. They do not communicate; they do not produce learning, and they add nothing useful to the child's life." When a learner understands and reacts to what he has read in the appropriate way, the knowledge of the world can be summarized, many of his affective needs would be fulfilled and the very fibres of his existence are touched. Hence, reading comprehension is a complex behaviour, which is not easy to pin down to a single definition. However, Oyetunde (1986), defines it as "an active constructive process involving the use of textual cues and the reader's background knowledge to build a model of the author's intending meaning.

A proper understanding of the nature of reading comprehension on the part of the teacher is

fundamental to teaching effectively. Three broad models of reading comprehension, which can be identified, are bottom-up or text-driven process, top-down or conceptually driven (schema) processing, and attentional and levels of processing. A close examination of these three models of reading comprehension stress the fact that three main factors affect reading comprehension;

- (1) the reader's background knowledge;
- (2) the linguistic input of the text; and
- (3) the quality of attention that a reader gives to the text.

A proper understanding of these models by the teacher is not only desirable but necessary, as the way we teach a subject is influenced in no small measure by our notions and assumptions of what it is, we are teaching.

Setting a purpose eliminates the tendency to want to read every material in the same way and at the same speed, which results in slow reading rate (as attempt to make up retains every information), superficial reading anti ineffective application and evaluation of what is read.

Commenting on the unresolved issue of whether or not a reading comprehension process is breakable into discrete sub-processes or skills, Oyetunde (1986), believes that while it is not in dispute that reading comprehension involves reasoning, this does not preclude it from having sub-skills. Therefore, reading comprehension can be reasoning and at the same time have sub-processes. If it is recognized that reading comprehension involves conscious and unconscious application of some cognitive processing skills or reasoning strategies, we have a sound basis for providing systematic comprehension instruction and remediation of comprehension problems. This is why Olukpe (1981), pointed out that, at all stage of the argument, one must engage in active dialogue with the material. For reading is rather like a conversation between the reader and the writer and readers who are full of questions are of course, the ones most likely to perceive the main ideas, see hidden implications and retain the whole, long after the reading is finished. He emphasized, the need to ask the following questions before the reading starts and after examining the titles, headings and sub-headings.

What is one's purpose in reading?

What general concepts does one already possess that will help one understand the subject?

What will be the problem under discussion?

However, one important way of establishing a purpose for students' reading is:

- (1) By asking appropriate pre-reading questions. The teacher can design these purpose setting pre- reading questions to require students to look for specific information in the passage:
- (2) To activate in them predictions about the text to be read;
- (3) To develop expectations;
- (4) To build or activate their prior knowledge;
- (5) To develop a thinking strategy to accompany their reading; and
- (6) To focus on the salient points or facts in the selection.

Whenever the students are motivated to read and react to the content of their reading in specific productive and interpretive ways, their reading could be said to be purposeful. And whatever the teacher does to guide students reading to a particular end can pass for purpose setting.

In support of the above mentioned point, Oyetunde (1986), quotes Quandt (1977:112), thus .. it is commonly accepted that children need either to be told, or through questioning, to be led to see a predetermined purpose for reading a selection.

Learning is strongly influenced by a learner attitudes, and it is difficult to image a child mustering enthusiasm towards a task for which there is no purpose.

Also, speaking on the specific functions of purpose setting, the same author quotes Roe et al (1978:156) that:

Purposes help focus students' thinking so that they understand and recall information from reading. Reading that lacks purpose tends to be random and less meaningful. Purposes help the reader actively seek understanding.

They can help students sort out important from unimportant information and to organize information.

Ebo Ubaliakwe (1979), also slated that, the SQ3R study technique encourages reading for a

purpose, as well as looking for specific answers and anticipating essential points of information.

Since questioning is an important means of setting purpose for reading, the teacher should note Greenwood's (1981:84), suggestion as cited by Oyetunde (1986), that, it is only pre-reading questions that can serve as a learning device, that is a means of developing certain skills in reading comprehension. Questions set afterwards act as a testing device since by their very position such questions cannot help the learner during the initial reading.

Also, since titles and paragraph headings are usually a statement of a main idea developed in the passage, the teacher can use them to develop in his students' an attitude of 'mental set' for what is to be read. That is, titles and paragraph heads can serve as a starting point for asking students to predict or anticipate the content of their reading.

### **Recommendations**

It should be noted that when dealing with a difficult or ambiguous passage, pictures can be used either to illustrate better an information than the passage (thus, simplifying it), or to disambiguate it. And where students do not have the necessary background knowledge to attack the text to be read, pictures can be used to serve as a schematic variable; that is, to provide a framework for interpreting or reacting to textual information.

Finally, pre-reading questions can be repeated not to 'test' students' understanding of what they have read, but to evaluate their processing strategies.

In conclusion, the foregoing conclusion has clearly demonstrated that whatever the teacher does to guide students' reading to a particular end can pass for purpose setting.

### **References**

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