

USING 'MIND MODELLING' AS A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING ESL READING: A STUDY

Dr.G.Raja Shekhar
Lecturer in English
Dr.V.S.Krishna Govt. Degree College, (A) Visakhapatnam.
Andhra Pradesh, India
rajashekhar.geddada@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Reading is not a passive process. Rather, it is an active process in which the reader brings his personal knowledge i.e. knowledge of the language and knowledge of the world. Strategic reading has become a widely recognised phenomenon in the recent years. Researchers now agree to the fact that strategic reading is vital in academic pursuits. More so, Reading is understood as a psycholinguistic guessing game (Goodman, 1967) so as to enable the learners to actively participate in the act doing it.. This study was conducted as a response to the need to develop effective reading habits in ESL learners. The study attempts to find out the feasibility of a reading strategy in a context where the students are not accustomed to strategic reading in the second language. The findings reveal that the strategy has a positive effect on the students. It has been noted that the students actively participate in the class; they look more articulate and show greater confidence in their approach. Further, their comprehension abilities are also enriched. The participants were 14-year old high school students, who were from a rural background and are at a beginner level proficiency. This present paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses *The Need of Strategic Reading* while the second one talks about the *Rationale* of the strategy named Mind Modelling. The third one details the *Implementation* of strategy and its *Outcome*.

Key words: Reading, Strategic Reading, Mind Modelling, Comprehension

Reading strategies:

Reading strategy is an activity used to help reading comprehension. "Strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, techniques used by students to enhance their own learning" (Scarcella and Oxford 1992). Strategies are goal oriented; that is, the individual initiates them to learn something, to solve a problem, or to comprehend something. Strategies include, but are not limited to, what have traditionally been referred to as study skills such as underlining, note-taking, and summarizing, as well as predicting, reviewing prior knowledge, and generating questions. They help learners improve their own perception, reception, storage, retention, and retrieval of language information.

Need of Strategic Reading:

Reading strategies are important as they facilitate the reading process and make the reader an effective reader. Strategic readers actively construct meaning as they read while interacting with the text. They set purposes for reading, select methods of accomplishing these purposes, monitor and repair their own comprehension, and evaluate the completed task (Nuttal, 2004). Reading comprehension becomes easier for struggling readers when strategies are used consciously and helps the readers become proficient users of the language. Strategies make reading more fun and help one to develop into independent readers. A strategic reader constructs, examines and extends meaning before, during, and after reading for a variety of texts. "Teachers who understand that reading is a strategic process establish environments that provide opportunities for children to learn language and learn about language while they are using language for real purposes" (Halliday, 1985).

One of the many problems students face nowadays is not their inability to read but their lack of interest, indifference or rejection of reading. Studies based on reading habits have particularly focused on the importance of the promotion of specific strategies to capitalize on their interests, make reading materials accessible, build a conducive environment, allow time to read in school, provide significant adult models and use motivational techniques (Clary, 1991).

Rationale of Mind Modelling

The technique of mind modelling places a lot of demand on the part of the teacher as his /her aim is to make the process of reading 'visible' so that it becomes easy for the learners to imitate the steps. Since, the aim of mind modelling is to demonstrate the mental processes i.e. the way a 'superior' reader takes while s/he makes sense of the text, the teacher has to be extra careful while displaying the techniques. The main aim of using this strategy is to reduce the confusion of learners about how people read and to make reading a smooth and easy activity.

Mental modelling informs the learners about the reasoning process that lie behind strategic reading (Pani, 2004). By using this strategy the teacher shows the student "how" of reading. To achieve this, the teacher thinks aloud as he negotiates for the meaning of the text. Thus, the students get an idea about how a "superior reader" thinks. Accordingly, the students would be able to adopt the same technique while they are reading. Also, the confusion among the learners about how to read is reduced as they can see the actual process demonstrated by the teacher. This strategy also helps to equalise the power relations between the teacher and the learners, which is a requirements of the pedagogy of possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOME

Before getting into the strategy, I encouraged the students to verbalize some of their everyday activities. Initially, I showed them how to do it by giving examples. For example I talked to them about the activity of getting up from my bed and how I made a cup of tea. After giving an introduction to how to verbalize our thought process, I divided the class into four groups and asked each of the groups to come up with one similar explanation on any topic. Initially, the students couldn't decide on the topics, so I had to work with the groups and help them arrive at a topic and also help them in writing down the content. The groups worked on subjects such as: lunch break, doing homework, coming to the school, and reading a difficult lesson. One of the students from each group narrated the content in front of the class. Thus, it was assured that the students understood what verbalizing activities meant. Once this was done and I was satisfied, I moved on to the other stage that is solving certain anagrams to further demonstrate how we verbalize our thoughts. This was done to ascertain that the students were comfortable with articulating their thoughts.

Then I introduced the lesson **Marie Curie (New wave series)** to them. I tried to elicit responses from them about who was Marie Curie. After that I gave the students 10 minutes time to read the lesson once and point out the difficult words so that while reading that was not a hindrance. The students reacted well and gave me several words that they thought were difficult. I wrote the words on the board.

After that I started reading the first paragraph. As I read the lesson I tried out to solve my problems and demonstrate them how to do it.

Q.T: fine. Now let us read the first paragraph.

*T: So what is the meaning of exhausting here? Exhausting years ... and what does it say. Four exhausting years. I know the meaning of four years., exhausting means something about the years... It might be long or something but something that is about the years, about the four years. Okay, let me read it again. **For more than four exhausting years, the Polish -born chemist Marie Curie and her husband, Pierre, worked in a large, dilapidated wooden shed near their lodgings in Paris, (text)***

So for four years they worked in this large dilapidated wooden shed. Okay so it talks about hard work, exhausting can be hard working. Yes, four hard working years. Right?

S: yes ... hardworking years

T: fine. NOW who are we talking about? Polish- born chemist Marie Curie and her Husband Pierre. Now, Polish born means just like India born. That is, they are polish. Polish are the citizen of which country, yes Poland. So they were Polish scientists. Who?

Since the paragraphs were small I read two passages to give them a better understanding of the technique. I took charge of the 1st paragraph, but in the 2nd paragraph, I encouraged the students to think along with me. This was done to give them confidence and better understanding of the technique.

After I finished the first two paragraphs, I encouraged each group to read one paragraph each. While they were doing so, other groups could interfere and give their opinions. This allowed for more interaction and deeper involvement for the entire class. The Students were

encouraged to guess the meaning of those unknown words: **Exhausting, Polish born chemist, dilapidated, shed, lodgings, pitchblende, clutter, cautiously, spontaneously, emitted, wagon, eminent, stubbornly** (already written on the board) by reading the context in which it was used. The students got immensely engaged in the process and their effort to find out the meanings of the unknown words was seen throughout the class. It was also seen that students could actually make the meaning out from the context in many cases. Also, they were able to comprehend the meaning of the longer sentences in a better way.

After the lesson was completed I asked them to answer the questions given at the back. I also asked them to give me the meaning of the words written on the board. I also asked for their feedback. The Students were really excited about this strategy, as this demanded a lot of participation from their side. Throughout the class I could see the students participating with a lot of interest. Moreover, after the class when the students gave me the meanings of the words without any help it was quite clear that they had actually learnt those words. It was also very interesting to notice the student trying to and also being able to comprehend sentences, which had tough words in it. There was an attempt from their side to get out the meaning from the context.

On the whole, I would say this strategy was a grand success as it enabled students to use strategies like inference, using cues to get the meaning, summarizing, reading for the main points, self-correction, paraphrasing, reading ahead and back for clues etc. This was a strategy that could be used to encourage our students to become good readers.

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