Code: **E02 / E06**

Title: **Developing students' higher order thinking skills in reading for a better transition to secondary schooling**

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Introduction

Good reading skills are essential to success in school as well as in life as they can open up opportunities for learning. However, reading demands increase as students move up to higher grade levels. At Key Stage 1, students are often exposed to more fiction than non-fiction, but they are required to read a wider range of information texts as they enter Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Apart from this, students also need to apply higher order thinking skills to analyse, infer, synthesize, and evaluate what they read to make critical responses as they embark on their journey from primary school to secondary school. Without guidance in learning how to read a variety of texts, students may encounter difficulties in learning across academic areas.

Strategies for improving reading comprehension

McWhorter (1995) contends that reading itself is a thinking process, which can be very complex. Being able to think logically during reading does not happen automatically, not to mention thinking critically. To teach students how to think when reading, teachers can guide students to interact with the text through think-alouds by modelling the thinking processes explicitly, followed by guided practice and independent practice (Snyder & Snyder 2008). Through teachers' demonstration, students can learn how to apply higher order thinking skills to better understand the text they read by determining the main idea through identifying supporting details, by inferring characters' feeling and personality in stories and guessing the meaning of unknown words using contextual and linguistic clues and so on. Furthermore, graphic organizers can be used to enhance thinking skills as "graphic organizers and outlines are fundamental to skilled thinking because they provide information and opportunities for analysis that reading alone and linear outline cannot provide" (Jones, Pierce & Hunter, 1988, p. 25).

In addition, it has been argued that knowledge of text organization or structure is an important factor for text comprehension (Meyer, 2003). Carrell (1985) found evidence that the explicit teaching of text structures has a positive effect on reading comprehension for ESL learners in her study, while Lorch and Lorch (1996) point out that students' awareness of text structures must increase as they move from reading stories to reading informational texts.

School-based experience

To better prepare students for their future challenges in reading, teachers from various schools have tried out the above-mentioned strategies. The reading curricula of their

schools were modified to facilitate the teaching of text structures and higher order thinking skills. Some key text structures commonly found in information texts such as cause-and-effect and problem-and-solution were identified and textbook units were reviewed to see if there was room to infuse the knowledge and skills related to those text structures into their reading curricula. A range of reading tasks based on the reading texts were designed to help students learn various text structures and text features such as signal words. To reinforce students' learning, graphic organisers were employed to help students develop their awareness of various text structures. Think-alouds and modelling were used to show how information in the text could be unpacked with the organizers. After teachers' explicit teaching, students were provided with opportunities to uncover the text structures by completing the corresponding graphic organizers through guided practice and independent practice.

Teachers also used think-alouds and modelling to demonstrate how to answer questions that required higher cognitive demands. For example, students learned how to identify main ideas and supporting details through using a tree diagram under the theme "Relationships" with teachers' demonstration. Students were then guided to make sense of the differences of main ideas and supporting details step by step through reading materials under the same theme, which allowed students to uncover what the main ideas and supporting details were paragraph by paragraph with decreasing guidance from the teacher.

Impact on learning

Teachers found that with more careful planning, their school-based reading curricula have become better matched with students' needs because the reading skills and strategies that enable students to read a wider range of informational texts have been heightened in the curricula and a wider variety of reading tasks and activities has been included. It was observed that students have gained more confidence in reading non-fiction texts and teachers were delighted to see more students mastering the skills of identifying main ideas and gaining more ideas on how to analyse and infer the text they read. Teachers believe that the coming batches of upper primary school students will benefit from their effort as they can develop higher order thinking skills through different sets of reading materials that are integrated with the learning units.

This sharing session aims to enhance teachers' understanding of the reading demands encountered by upper primary school students and provide ideas and suggestions on how to foster students' higher order thinking skills for reading comprehension through videos, student work and school-based teaching and learning materials.

(This session is intended for teachers who did not participate in a similar seminar last year.)

References

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