

TRANSACTIONAL STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION TO STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRAK

Reading Comprehension adalah suatu proses pemahaman terhadap wacana tulis yaitu teks. Siswa dengan kesulitan membaca membutuhkan strategi yang dapat mempermudah untuk memahami makna dalam teks. *Transactional Strategy Instruction* adalah strategi yang cukup baik untuk mengatasi siswa dengan kesulitan belajar (*learning difficulties*) karena strategi ini memiliki beberapa tahapan dalam implementasinya. Pertama, pembaca menafsirkan teks melalui pengalaman pribadi mereka sendiri dan pengetahuan sebelumnya; selain itu guru harus membantu pembaca untuk kembali ke bacaan, memahami kembali dan menikmati pengalaman mereka dalam belajar. Tahap kedua belajar transaksional dapat dicapai melalui diskusi kelompok di mana siswa akan diajak untuk membuat laporan dari teks yang mereka baca sebelumnya. *Transactional Strategy Instruction* juga menekankan kemampuan guru untuk memberikan penjelasan eksplisit dan memfasilitasi diskusi siswa di mana siswa bekerja sama untuk membentuk interpretasi dan pemahaman bersama dari teks.

Key words: Transactional Strategy Instruction, Reading Comprehension, Learning Difficulties

A. INTRODUCTION

Meaning, learning, and pleasure are the ultimate goals of learning to read. Knowing how to read words has ultimately little value if the student is unable to construct meaning from text. Ultimately, reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning by coordinating a number of complex processes that include word reading, word and world knowledge, and fluency. In the last few years the phonological awareness and decoding skills of students with reading disabilities have been identified as serious inhibitors to successful reading. Although there is little question that difficulties in these foundational skills impede successful growth in reading for many students, it is also true that many students with learning disabilities have significant challenges understanding and learning from text even when they are able to decode

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adequately. Explicit and highly structured development of beginning reading skills is required, as is highly structured instruction in reading comprehension.

Students with learning difficulties are likely to demonstrate difficulties with decoding, fluency (reading words quickly and accurately), and vocabulary. Difficulty in any of these three areas will interfere with reading comprehension. One reason for this interference is that readers only have so much short-term cognitive, or thinking, capacity for a task. If too much effort is allocated to decoding, little capacity is available for focusing on comprehension. Thus, the students with learning difficulties need transactional strategies instruction to make them easier in comprehending the reading.

Transactional strategies instruction is done for giving support and guidance to students while their interacting with text and learning content. Dealing with this, the writer would like to explain about this strategy in order to facilitate the students with learning difficulties in reading comprehension.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Reading Comprehension

Reading is the ability to obtain any information or messages that can build perception and capability to express what is read before. Ur says that reading means understanding a written text². She gives some points when people read, they need to perceive and decode letters, and they understand words and symbols in a text and gather meaning from what is read. From her statement, it can be concluded that when beginning to read a text, the students depend on decoding letters to understand words; but as soon as there is a meaningful context, they tend to bring their own interpretation to the word according to its general shapes and the sense of the text rather than according to its exact component letters. Thus, reading activities should stress on reading for understanding rather than decoding of letters.

Reading for comprehension is the primary purpose for reading, raising student awareness of main ideas in a text and exploring the organization of a text is essential for good comprehension. This is in line with Fielding and Pearson (in O'Malley and Pierce) state that reading comprehension depends heavily on knowledge

²Ur, Penny. *A course in Language Teaching Practice and Theory*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). p. 138.

about the world as well as on knowledge of language and print.³ It means that when the students read, they try to comprehend the symbol or written words about whatever it is to construct new knowledge from the interaction between texts and background knowledge.

Reading comprehension is thinking guided by print. The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading. Students with learning difficulties need more reading activities to make them interact with the text. They are often the poorest readers; they demonstrate multiple problems associated with low comprehension, including poor decoding, fluency, and comprehension. These students also exhibit characteristics of inactive learners who do not monitor their learning or use strategies effectively. Yet, students with learning difficulties can improve their reading comprehension if teachers:

1. Teach strategies that have been documented as effective in promoting reading comprehension.
2. Design instruction that incorporates effective principles of direct instruction and strategy instruction.
3. Provide modeling, support, guided instruction, practice, attribution feedback, and opportunities to practice across text types.
4. Monitor students' progress and make adjustments accordingly⁴.

Many of the reading comprehension strategies that have been associated with the highest effect sizes for students with learning difficulties are those that teach students strategies that prompt them to monitor and reflect before, during, and after reading. These strategies ask students to (1) consider their background knowledge on the topic they are reading, (2) summarize key ideas, and (3) self-question while they read.

Reading comprehension involves much more than readers' responses to text. Reading comprehension is a multi component, highly complex process that involves many interactions between readers and what they bring to the text (previous knowledge,

³O'Malley, J. Michael and Pierce. *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners*. (New York: Wesley Publishing Company, 1996), p. 94.

⁴Klingner, Janette. Et al. *Teaching Reading Comprehension to Students with Learning Difficulties*. (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), p. 4.

strategy use) as well as variables related to the text itself (interest in text, understanding of text types).

Irwin describes five basic comprehension processes that work together simultaneously and complement one another: micro-processes, integrative processes, macro-processes, elaborative processes, and meta-cognitive processes.⁵ While reading about these different cognitive processes, keep in mind that the reader uses these different strategies fluidly, going back and forth from focusing on specific chunks of text, as with micro-processing, to stepping back and reflecting about what has been read, as with meta-cognition.

1. Micro-processes

Micro-processing refers to the reader's initial chunking of idea units within individual sentences. "Chunking" involves grouping words into phrases or clusters of words that carry meaning, and requires an understanding of syntax as well as vocabulary. For example, consider the following sentence:

Michelle put the yellow roses in a vase.

The reader does not picture *yellow* and *roses* separately, but instead immediately visualizes roses that are the color yellow. The good reader processes *yellow roses* together.

Selective recall is another aspect of micro-processing. The reader must decide which chunks of text or which details are important to remember. When reading only one sentence, it is relatively easy to recall details, but remembering becomes more difficult after reading a long passage. For example, the reader may or may not remember later that the roses were yellow. To some extent, whether this detail is remembered will depend upon its significance in the passage. In other words, does it matter in the story that the roses were yellow, or is this just an unimportant detail?

⁵Irwin, J.W. Teaching reading comprehension processes. (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991) p. 10.

2. Integrative Processes

As the reader progresses through individual sentences, he or she is processing more than the individual meaning units within sentences. He or she is also actively making connections across sentences. This process of understanding and inferring the relationships among clauses is referred to as integrative processing. Sub skills involved in integrative processing include being able to identify and understand pronoun referents and being able to infer causation or sequence. The following two sentences demonstrate how these sub skills are applied:

Michael quickly locked the door and shut the windows. He was afraid.

To whom does *he* apply? Good readers seem to automatically know that *he* in the second sentence refers to *Michael* in the first sentence. And good readers infer that

Michael locked the door and shut the windows *because* he was afraid.

3. Macro- Processes

Ideas are better understood and more easily remembered when the reader is able to organize them in a coherent way. The reader does this by summarizing the key ideas read. He or she may either automatically or deliberately (i.e., subconsciously or consciously) select the most important information to remember and delete relatively less important details. The skillful reader also uses a structure or organizational pattern to help him or her organize these important ideas. More proficient comprehenders know to use the same organizational pattern provided by the author to organize their ideas (e.g., a story map that includes characters and setting/problem/solution in a narrative or a compare-and-contrast text structure for an expository passage).

4. Elaborative Processes

When we read, we tap into our prior knowledge and make inferences beyond points described explicitly in the text. We make inferences that may or may not correspond with those intended by the author. For instance, in the two sentences provided above about Michael, we do not know why he was afraid. But we can predict

that perhaps he was worried that someone had followed him home, or maybe a storm was brewing and he was concerned about strong winds. When making these inferences, we may draw upon information provided earlier in the text or upon our own previous experiences (e.g., perhaps at some point the reader was followed home and hurried inside and quickly shut and locked the door). This process is called elaborative processing.

5. Meta-cognitive Processes

Much has been made of the importance of meta-cognition, that is, thinking about thinking. Meta-cognition is the reader's conscious awareness or control of cognitive processes. The meta-cognitive processes the reader uses are those involved in monitoring understanding, selecting what to remember, and regulating the strategies used when reading. The meta-cognitive strategies the reader uses include rehearsing (i.e., repeating information to enhance recall), reviewing, underlining important words or sections of a passage, note taking, and checking understanding.

We know that reading comprehension is a complex process of constructing meaning by coordinating a number of skills related to decoding, word reading, and fluency and the integration of background knowledge, vocabulary, and previous experiences. Most notably, comprehension is an active process to which the reader brings his or her individual attitudes, interests, and expectations.

2. Students with Learning Difficulties

Learning Difficulties refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information.⁶ These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning a, in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are specific not global impairments and as such are distinct from intellectual disabilities.

⁶ *Learning Disabilities a New Definition*. Learning Abilities Association of Ontario. (Ontario: 2011) p. 3

Learning difficulties may also cause difficulties with organizational skills, social perception and social interaction.⁷ Learning Difficulties refer to a number of conditions that might affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning difficulties are distinct from global intellectual disabilities.

Students with learning difficulties might demonstrate problems with one or more types of memory. Working memory is a component of memory in which information is stored and/or manipulated for brief periods of time in order to perform another activity.⁸ It enables learners to hold on to pieces of information until the pieces blend into a full thought or concept. Working memory is important for a range of activities, such as controlling attention, problem-solving, and listening and reading comprehension. A student with working memory difficulties might have forgotten the first part of an instruction by the time the full instruction has been given. Or the student might be unable to recall the beginning of a sentence by the time he/she has read to the end. Some students will be unable to hold material in working memory in order to complete a task or understand a concept.

Short term Memory is a component of memory where information is stored briefly until it is either forgotten or integrated into long term memory.⁹ It is similar to working memory, however more passive as information is not manipulated. A student with short term memory challenges might not be able to remember information long enough to copy it down from one place to another.

Long-term memory refers to information that has been stored and is available over a long period of time.¹⁰ Effective short-term memory is critical to move information into long-term memory. A student with long-term memory difficulties might find it necessary to review and study information over a longer period of time in

⁷ *Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities*, A Guide for Teachers. (Colombia: Ministry of Education, 2011).p.6

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10

order for it to become part of his or her general body of knowledge. Rehearsal, repetition and association are well-known paths to improving long-term memory.

3. Teaching Reading Comprehension to Students with Learning Difficulties

Teachers can plan for students with learning difficulties by asking themselves key questions about how to best to support them based on their personal learning profiles. Many students with learning difficulties experience considerable difficulty with reading. Proficient reading is a highly complex task that requires extensive knowledge and a broad range of skills:

- Rapid, sequential processing of visual symbols to recognize letters and word forms
- Forming virtually instantaneous associations between visual word forms and oral word forms
- Understanding vocabulary
- Drawing upon linguistic knowledge to attain meaning from the word order
- Mastery of writing conventions to know the significance of punctuation
- Gathering and holding sufficient basic material in working memory to access the ideas being expressed
- Collecting and holding the ideas to facilitate comprehension.¹¹

Teachers' should focus on enabling the students to acquire skills, such as encoding and decoding, increasing fluency and improving comprehension. To meet with success in school and in the world, students need assistance in "learning to read" and in acquiring skills to actively engage in "reading to learn".

Students with learning difficulties might demonstrate significant growth in their reading skills as a result of direct instruction provided in an individualized setting but fail to transfer the skills they have acquired to other learning situations. They might require specific instruction in ways to adapt their reading skills to fit a variety of applications. For all students, but particularly for students with learning disabilities, teachers should teach specific reading strategies in the context of content learning, and across a variety of content areas, so students learn to apply strategies in more than one

¹¹ Klingner, Janetta, et.al., *loc.cit.*, p. 3

circumstance. For example use the same graphic organizers for making sense of a social studies text as well as for developing an outline for a report.

What can teachers do to assure that students monitor their comprehension? Most students with learning difficulties need to learn the same fix-up strategies that mature readers use to (1) identify when understanding breaks down and (2) know how to repair what they missed. These strategies can be taught to students. Teachers can assist students in using comprehension strategies by doing the following:

- Encourage students to monitor their understanding while they read and to make notes of difficult words, concepts, or ideas.
- Ask students questions during reading to guide and focus their reading.
- Focus students on aspects of the text that require inferences.
- Ask students to summarize the main idea of passages as they read.
- Remind students to consider predictions made prior to reading and confirm, disconfirm, or extend them.
- Give students opportunities to respond to, and elaborate on, what they've read.
- Allow students to formulate questions about what they've read and then to answer those questions.
- Ask students to summarize the key ideas about their reading.¹²

Perhaps one of the most important activities related to improving reading comprehension concerns what students do after they read. Students benefit from summarizing the key ideas they've read and responding to the reading in various ways, including writing, drawing, and discussing. After reading, students can identify concepts or words that were difficult and seek clarification.

4. Transactional Strategies Instruction to Students with Learning Difficulties

The transactional approach to strategy instruction, the teacher provides support and guidance to students as they apply strategies while interacting with text and learning content. Through teacher explanation, modeling, and supported practice, students learn to use repertoires of comprehension strategies. A central goal of instruction is the self-regulated use of the strategies. Pressley stated that the term *transactional* is used to emphasize that (1) meaning is determined through the interaction of prior knowledge and information conveyed through print; (2) one

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

person's reaction is influenced by what other group members do, think, and say; and (3) the meaning that emerges is the product of the group's interactions.¹³

Capable readers use comprehension strategies efficiently—indeed, almost effortlessly. The implications for instruction from cognitive psychology are that:

- Students learn the strategies used by capable thinkers to accomplish tasks.
- Instruction begins with explanations and modeling of strategies, followed by supported practice.
- Strategy practice typically continues for a long time, until the strategy can be implemented with little effort, across a variety of situations, and is self regulated.
- Strategy instruction includes meta cognitive information about when and where to use the strategy, as well as how to monitor its effectiveness of strategies.¹⁴

Transactional strategies instruction goes beyond cognitive psychology, though, by acknowledging the importance of others in the learning process and putting even greater emphasis on the role of background knowledge.

According to Casteel, Isom, and Jordan transactional strategies instruction consists of three phases: explanation and modeling, practice and coaching, and transfer of responsibility.¹⁵

1. Explanation and modeling

It is helpful for the teacher to make posters or displays for each of the strategies and post them on the wall where students can easily see them. Then the teacher selects a strategy to teach. The teacher defines and explains the selected strategy to students and models its usage. Then he or she emphasizes why the strategy is helpful and explains when it might be most appropriate to use it.

2. Practice and coaching

Next the teacher provides students with opportunities for guided practice and feedback. The teacher coaches as necessary, possibly asking questions such as What do you do next? How is the strategy helpful? During this phase the teacher provides

¹³Pressley, M., Hogan, K., Wharton-McDonald, R., & Mistretta, J. *The challenges of instructional scaffolding: The challenges of instruction that supports student thinking. Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, (1996). p. 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.146

¹⁵ Casteel, C. P., Isom, B. A., & Jordan, K. F. *Creating confident and competent readers: Transactional strategies instruction. Intervention in School and Clinic*, 36,(2000) p. 67.

students with practice in implementing the strategies as well as in selecting which strategy to use at different times.

3. Transfer of responsibility

Once students have become proficient strategy users, then they can use various strategies while reading, monitoring their understanding, and discussing the meaning of text in small reading groups. They assume responsibility for selecting and implementing strategies.

The teacher continues to coach students as they use various strategies as they work in their groups.¹⁶

Six Strategies of Transactional Strategies Instruction and How to Teach Them during the “Practice and Coaching” Phase of Instruction

Name of Strategy	What students to	How to teach strategy
Predicting	Students predict what they think a selection will be about or what they will learn. During reading, they can modify their predictions if they choose. After reading, they verify if their predications were correct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students what they already know about the topic. • Teach students to read the title, skim the text, and look at headings before making their predictions. • Ask students what information they used to come up with their predictions. • Have students modify their predictions as they learn new information while reading. • Teach students to check the accuracy of their predictions after reading. • Ask students to think about how helpful it is to predict.
Questioning and answering	Students answer questions about the passage. The teacher may ask questions about the text at key points during and after reading. Or students may generate questions, either before reading, about what they would like to learn, or after reading, about key	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students to identify different types of questions and the strategy for finding the answer to each. • “Right There”—Find the answer in one place in the book. • “Think and Search”—Find the answer in more than one place in the book. • “Author and Me”—Find the answer in the book and in your head. • “On My Own”—Answer the

¹⁶ Klingner, Janette. *op. Cit.*, p. 140.

	points. Students identify the question–answer relationships and answer the questions.	question using what you already know about the topic. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students how to generate questions using these same question types.
Visualizing	Students construct mental images that represent text content. Extension: Students construct graphic representations of their mental images.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students to visualize the content in a passage or imagine what is happening. • For stories, have students visualize what is happening at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. • For informational text, have students think about key words and visualize the content they are learning. • Ask students to explain their images. • Have students compare the picture in their minds with what they are reading. • Extension: Have students draw diagrams or pictures to represent their visualizations.
Seeking Clarifications	During reading, students monitor their understanding. When the text does not make sense, the student selects a strategy to help clarify the confusing text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students to check their understanding while reading. At first, frequently ask students, “Does this make sense?” Encourage students to do the same. • Teach students to select a strategy to use to fix comprehension when breakdowns occur. These can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore and read on. • Guess, using clues from the context. • Reread for clarification. • Look back in the text for clues that can help. • Ask students to explain why they selected the strategy they did, and if it helped.
Responding to text based on prior knowledge	Students make connections between the text and their background knowledge and personal experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to tell how the information from the passage relates to their own lives. • Ask students how the information might be important to them and how it might help them. • Encourage students to discuss their ideas with one another. Ask how considering different points of view can broaden their knowledge.

Summarizing	After reading, students summarize the passage. For informational text, they restate the most important ideas. For narrative text, they retell the story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students to differentiate between expository and narrative texts. • When retelling a story, have students describe the setting, characters, problem, events (in order), and the solution. • For expository text, have students restate the main ideas in the passage.
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Once students have developed some proficiency in applying the strategies through whole-class instruction, much of the strategy implementation takes place in small groups in which students engage in meaningful conversations about the text they are reading. Students discuss their predictions, interpretive images, questions, summaries, and reflections about how to deal with difficult aspects of the text.

C. CONCLUSION

Transactional strategies instruction will help students with learning difficulties to comprehend the text they have read. The teacher as the students' facilitator used this strategy to break down their mind in reading the text. The teacher asked her students to remind their background knowledge when they read the text in order to achieve the right prediction about the content of the text. The students discussed with their friends in group to gain the message of the text. This strategy can be effective for improving the reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities as well as other students.

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