



THE DIFFERENCES AND CHALLENGES OF UNDERSTANDING AND READING

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Understanding and reading are interconnected processes, yet they serve distinct purposes in the realm of language comprehension. Reading is the process of decoding written symbols into meaningful language, while understanding involves interpreting and making sense of the information conveyed by the text. Both are essential for effective communication, but each presents its own set of challenges

Most people would say they know what the word comprehension means, at least in general sense, although it is not a term that occurs often in everyday speech. In fact, it is almost exclusively found in the context of reading. In everyday speech we are much more likely to use the term understanding or even my preferred alternative of making sense. The word comprehension was rarely used in the research literature on reading before the 1950 , when systems analysts and behavioral engineers were first recruited to design reading programs(Smith,1998,p.116).

In other words, comprehension is a kind of up-market synonym for understanding in discussions that are (or are intended to appear) technical and scientific. In such contexts the word frequently doesn't appear alone, but in such combinations as comprehension skill or the comprehension process, even by people who would never use expressions like understanding skills or the understanding process. (Understanding reading,12p.)

Everything that we know and believe is organized into a personal theory of what the world is like, a theory that is the basis of all our perceptions and understanding of the world, the root of all learning, the source of hopes and fears, motives and expectancies, reasoning and creativity. And this theory is all we have . If we can make sense of the world at all, it is by interpreting our experience with the world in the light of our theory. The theory is our shield against bewilderment. (Understanding reading,14 p.)

Comprehension may be regarded as relating what we attend to in the world around us - the visual information of print in the case of reading - to what we already have in our heads. And learning can be considered as modifying what we



already have in our heads as a consequence of attending to the world around us. (Smith 1994,53)

It is through talk that people construe their cultural worlds, display and recreate their social orders, plan and critique their activities, and praise and condemn their fellows. (- Fraake 1980,334.)

If reading is natural activity, then literacy education should obviously center on aspects of reading that are most natural to us. The most natural activity for human beings is to engage in interesting experience, the absence of which leads to boredom and with-drawl. But experience is not a topic that has much currency in education, except for the absurd suggestion that some students are supposed to acquire. And the deliberate acquisition of information is not a particularly natural activity. People usually accumulate information without trying, in the course of engaging in interesting experiences. The interest is always in the experience, rather than in the information. The intentional acquisition of information, especially at the arbitrary behest of others, is one of the most tedious and unnatural activities anyone can engaged in.(Understanding reading,p.55)

Another way to give students practice with scanning is to have a contest. Students form teams, and each student receives and a handout that includes lots of facts. I sometimes use fact sheets on different countries-for example, on China's fourteen coastal port cities. Equipped with a long list of questions and answers, the teacher throws a question out to the class. The first team to answer the question correctly, gets two points. If a team gets the answer wrong, they lose a point. The team with the most points wins.

Unlike skimming and scanning, activities that aim at having students read for thorough comprehension require students to read meticulously. The goal is for the students to read meticulously. The goal is for the students to understand the total meaning of a reading selection, and there are a number of techniques teachers can use to get students to interacts with the reading material. Here are some of these techniques.

- Students study the title and skim to capture the main idea.
- Students read two paragraphs and predict what will follow.
- Students do several different scanning tasks, such as underlining past tense verbs in red and adverb indicating sequence (e.g., first, second, next, etc.) in blue, circling words they do not recognize, and putting stars next to words that seem important. After each task, they briefly discuss what they underlined, circled or starred.
- After students have a sense of what the reading material is about, they read silently while answering true-false or multiple-choice questions.



- Students meet in groups, consider the text, write down questions, and give them to another group to answer.
- Students draw pictures of the main characters in story or draw pictures that illustrate the story line.
- Students working in groups, reconstruct material previously cut into pieces (also called a jigsaw task).
- Students read a story with the conclusion missing, then write their own endings.(Teaching English as a foreign or second language,p.205.)

All in all, reading and understanding are vital yet distinct components of language processing. Recognizing their differences and addressing their challenges can significantly improve one's ability to interpret and engage with written content, fostering both intellectual growth and effective communication.

REFERENCE

- 1 Frank Smith (2012) Understanding Reading 6th edition published by Routledge 711 Third Avenue. New York.
- 2 Jerry G. Gebhard (1996) Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language published in the United States of America by the University of Michigan Press.