
Chapter 1

Reflecting on Teaching Reading

Reading (either in a first or subsequent language) is not an easy subject to define (or teach), and debates still exist over the best methods to use. Some people in the U.S. call these the “reading wars” because there is not much agreement on how reading in a first language should be delivered in classrooms. It should be stated from the outset that many of the developments in teaching methodology in second language (L2) reading have been affected by debates on topics such as the development of teaching letter-sound correspondence to beginning readers, the teaching of vocabulary, the teaching of various reading strategies, and the use of extensive reading. Given the many and sometimes conflicting directions that teachers have heard for teaching both first and second language reading, it is no wonder that novice (and also experienced) teachers face a dilemma when deciding what to implement

in their reading classes. As Grabe and Stoller (2002: 40) have noted, “One of the most difficult tasks we face as reading teachers is deciding how to make use of reading research for our own purposes.” This chapter offers various strategies and scenarios that teachers can consider when teaching L2 reading. As mentioned in the Introduction, these strategies and scenarios are not the most important or the only strategies for teaching L2 reading; they are suggestions intended to help teachers to reflect on how to approach the teaching of L2 reading.

—Strategy 1.1: Reflect on the Nature of Reading

Most, if not all, reading teachers are fluent readers themselves. However, just because teachers are fluent readers does not mean that they can explain the reading process or how they themselves read to those who struggle with reading. It is important for teachers (and students too) to understand what happens when they read, because, as Tierney and Pearson (1994: 496) have noted, “If teachers understand the nature of reading comprehension and learning from a text, they will have the basis for evaluating and improving learning environments” for their students learning to read. And so we begin with attempting to figure out what reading is. For sure, reading is a complex process because it involves both conscious and subconscious actions by the reader. Eskey (2002: 5) maintains that reading is a process of obtaining information from a written text but does not involve “converting written language into spoken language.” As Aebersold and Field (1997: 15) suggest, “Reading is what happens when people look at a text and assign meaning to the written symbols in that text.” It

is the interaction between the text and the reader that creates meaning—what is written on the page and what knowledge is in the reader’s head.

APPLICATION(S)

Teachers (and students) can (and probably should) first define what reading means to them and then compare their definitions to Anthony, Pearson, and Raphael’s (1993: 284) classic definition: “Reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader’s existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language, and the context of the reading situation.” The reason for using this definition is that it introduces teachers to different models of reading. The *top-down model* argues that readers bring prior knowledge and experiences to the text and that they continue to read as long as the text confirms their expectations. The *bottom-up model* suggests that a reader reads the words and sentences and looks at the organization of the text (without relating it to experience or prior knowledge) in order to construct meaning. The *interactive model* argues that both top-down and bottom-up processes occur when a person reads a text. If we read this sentence for example: *iF yuo aer a fluet reodur yuo will hve no pRblme reOdng ths sNtnce*” (Wray & Medwell 1991: 98), how do we interpret its meaning? A purely bottom-up strategy simply cannot account for the comprehension of this sentence, so top-down strategies must also come into play so that the reader may find “meaning” in these symbols. Thus, a good start for both teachers and students would be to reflect on their own reading behaviors, the nature of reading, and the reading process itself to see which model, or combination of models, they think they employ in their own reading behaviors. An understanding their own reading behaviors and the reading

process itself can help teachers begin to reflect on how they want to teach reading and how they currently teach reading. In addition, reading teachers can help their students become more aware of their own reading behaviors.

PRECAUTION(S)

Teachers must always remember that cultural orientations and prior experiences influence a reader's interpretations of a text. Indeed, cultures regard the role and responsibility of the reader and the writer differently (e.g., Korea, Japan, China, the U.S., and the U.K.). When studying in North America or any Western-style educational system, students from other cultures need to be explicitly aware of these differences. However, recently, larger numbers of students who are not literate in their first language have come to North America; these students are unable to fully reflect on their reading habits when they are asked about them. As Koda (2005) has noted, if a reader's first language reading background is of a high-proficiency level, then this will significantly contribute to successful L2 reading because he or she can draw on prior literacy experience.

SCENARIO

John, an ESL teacher in the United States, wanted his intermediate-level students to better understand the reading process so he asked them to read this short paragraph and then write about its meaning:

At first you believe it is absolutely impossible to do, no matter how hard you concentrate. In fact, it always does take some time to get it right. Then, just when you get used to doing it competently, you hear of an alternative method. While the final choice is, of course, yours, if you are mature and responsible you'll realize that there is one way which is superior. People sometimes need to do it in strange positions, so flexibility is an asset.

First, John put the paragraph on the OHT (overhead transparency) and asked his students to read it slowly. Then he asked the students to write what they thought the meaning of the paragraph was. When he asked for answers, some laughed and said that it was about sex, but nobody was able to give him the answer he was looking for, which was *how to tie a shoelace*. He explained to his class that the paragraph is simple enough in terms of vocabulary. All his students understood each word in the text, but they did not understand the whole paragraph. The main point that John wanted his students to understand is that the ability to simply decode a text is not sufficient to make the overall meaning of the paragraph clear. John wanted his students to understand that the reading process does not just involve understanding every word, as many ESL students think. John explained to his students that the reader must also *engage* in active interpretation of the text by linking the paragraph to his or her prior knowledge of the world. In other words, John told them what the brain tells the eye is more important than what the eye tells the brain.

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the scenario from John's class.
- How can teachers help students become aware of how they read?

—Strategy 1.2: Reflect on Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

Many lower-level ELLs who may be struggling with reading, some of whom have never been exposed to an alphabetic orthography, may need specific instruction in how to establish letter-sound correspondences. Grabe (2009: 38) suggests that

these students be made aware of phonological sounds and recognition of letters of the script or the “alphabetic principle,” as he calls it. Phonemic awareness builds conscious awareness for beginning ELLs of the sounds within words. Teachers can teach phonemic and phonic awareness in reading classes with beginning students after performing a check on the linguistic backgrounds of the students. Fogarty (2007) maintains that phonemic awareness in lessons comes with an overall analysis of words, beginning with sound awareness and then moving on to phonics and derivatives of root words, prefixes, suffixes, and ultimately to context. He has noted that “phonics builds sound-letter relationships beginning with the base of hard consonants, soft consonants, and sounds to blends, digraphs and diphthongs, and schwa sounds” (36).

APPLICATION(S)

Fogarty (2007) points out that phonemic awareness is best developed through the use of songs (e.g., songs that manipulate phonemes) and/or rhymes (e.g., *cat*, *sat*, *mat*) in classes. Phonics matches sounds and letters (e.g., /k/-/æ/-/t/ is *cat*). Teachers can also sing alphabet songs with students, read them stories, and get them to clap to the beats or syllables in words and play with rhymes. Teachers can also play spelling and word games such as Scrabble and *Hang Man* in class. The main point of this type of instruction in phonemic awareness is that when ESL or EFL readers encounter words they don’t know, they can sound them out and then try to decode them as they read.

PRECAUTION(S)

The use of phonics may not always teach students the meaning of the words they are sounding out, so teachers must include this type of awareness instruction within an overall reading

system that leads the students to understand these sounds and develop their vocabulary.

SCENARIO

Mary, an ESL teacher in a U.S. elementary school, discovered that she had a lot of immigrant students in her classes that were from backgrounds that did not use the English alphabet. She did some sound-out-the-word lessons to help the students read easier books. She focused her lesson on blending sounds into words. She used rhyme in her lesson. She started by telling her class that she was hiding a picture of something in her hand and that she would help them guess what it was by saying parts of the words. She started with *c + at* to see if the students would be able to blend the parts and discover the word. If they were correct, then she would show them the picture. They were correct, so she repeated this process with the next, *b+at*, but they were not able to guess. So Mary showed them the picture and then they were able to blend the parts of the word. She continued this activity of blending parts of words into whole words for the rest of the class. For the next class she played a song that included many of the whole words from the previous lesson and asked the students to point to the correct picture at the appropriate time during the song (e.g., when *cat* was sung, the students had to point to the picture of the cat on the wall). She planned to continue with this method until the students were comfortable sounding out words themselves.

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the scenario from Mary's class.
- When do you think the use of phonics in reading classes makes sense?



—Strategy 1.3: Reflect on Reading Fluency

Reading fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly, effortlessly, and with appropriate expression and meaning (Rasinski, 2003). Fluent readers are able to perform multiple tasks at the same time; for example, they can recognize words while comprehending their meaning (Block & Israel, 2005). Fluent readers probably need to know about 95 percent or more of the words they see in the texts, which is difficult, so teachers need to focus their instruction not only on reading strategies, but on teaching students ways to make use of discourse information (text structure and discourse organization) to aid in comprehension and fluency (Nation, 2002). Although there is not full agreement as to the optimal reading rate in terms of words per minute, Jensen (1986: 106) maintains that L2 readers should attempt to “approximate native speaker reading rates and comprehension levels in order to keep up with classmates.” She suggests that 300 words per minute is the optimal rate for efficient comprehension.

APPLICATION(S)

Reading fluency is a balancing act between reading rate and reading comprehension, and the greater the overlap between comprehension and rate, the greater the fluency of the reader. Teachers can help students increase their reading fluency by increasing their reading rates. Guided reading of instructional materials with emphasis on repeated reading of the same material is one of the most powerful ways to increase fluency (and even comprehension), and it transfers to other material not previously encountered. Authentic fluency instruction that requires repeated readings, practice, or rehearsal can include the use of songs, poetry, lyrics, plays, scripts, monologues, and

other types of oral presentations that work well for expressive oral reading and mastery of meaning. In addition, fluency training should include paired readings on the same topic in class, reading at home, and discussions about the readings. Reading fluency can also be achieved by getting students to read more both inside and outside class, at their own level of reading without stopping.

PRECAUTION(S)

It is important to remember that the goal here is not to develop speed readers but to develop more fluent readers. But when students read at faster rates, they are generally becoming more fluent readers.

SCENARIO

Yoko, an English language teacher in Japan, wanted to increase the reading fluency of her intermediate-level EFL students. She decided to try a reading activity that can increase reading rates. But before she introduced this activity to her class, she wanted to make sure her students' background knowledge of the topic was activated so she could make use of that as she told them the purpose of the reading. Yoko consistently tells students the purpose of the reading in her reading classes because she believes that this type of pre-reading activity helps with reading fluency and comprehension. Next she gave the students a set period of time, two minutes in this case, to read a passage (two pages), and at the end of the two minutes, she asked the students to stop and write one thing they learned from what they read. She then paired her students and asked them to share with their partners. The idea is to show how reading for comprehension is also a part of reading quickly for fluency. Since most of her students did not finish the two pages in two minutes, she told them to start again from the beginning and

to read for another two minutes. Then she stopped them and asked them to write again what they had learned and to share it with the same partner. She had hoped her students would realize that they were reading what they had read the first time much more quickly and were then moving on to the new material more quickly. She repeated this activity a few more times until her students had finally reached the end of the two pages. Yoko used this process to build up their reading rates and reading fluency.

//////////////////// **REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS** //////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Yoko's class.
 - What ways can teachers increase their students' reading speed?
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—Strategy 1.4: Reflect on Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is closely related to reading fluency: as decoding becomes more automated (e.g., fluent reading), readers are able to devote more attention to comprehending what they are reading. To be able to “comprehend” a text successfully, students need to be able to (re)construct the meaning from the text by using a combination of what they already know about the topic (or their prior knowledge of the topic), the information that is provided in the text they are reading, and their comprehension based on these two (prior experience and information from the text) when they have finished reading (or decoding) that text. Of course, the type and amount of knowledge and reading skills vary by reader; however, background knowledge about the content is very important when readers attempt to comprehend a text (Koda, 2005). The

most important knowledge for L2 readers is the extent of their world knowledge and how they are able to connect it with the text being read. This is achieved through a series of networkable connections known as schema, in which people organize their world knowledge into categories and systems that make retrieval easier (Pardo, 2004). Schema theory recognizes that readers have prior knowledge about a topic before they read.

APPLICATION(S)

Teachers play a vital role in assisting with effective reading comprehension by activating existing background knowledge on a topic or building readers' background knowledge of the topic if it is lacking *before* they read, followed by guiding the readers *during* reading, and then providing some sort of review *after* reading. Since a text (written or spoken) does not by itself carry meaning, it can only provide direction for readers as to how they should construct meaning originating from their own background knowledge. Before reading lessons, teachers should brainstorm a topic with the students to find out what they know about a topic and then ask them to make predictions about the content. Students can also be asked to make predictions about the topic using the title of the passage. Another option is to ask students to construct a semantic map of the topic by putting the title in the middle of the page, and ask the students to fill in the ideas that they think may occur in the passage they are about to read. If teachers discover that background knowledge of a topic is lacking by the students, they may need to pre-teach vocabulary specific to the topic, such as key words in the target passages, and provide them with the necessary background information about the topic so that they can comprehend better. One strategy to use during reading is to stop the students and ask them to predict what they think will happen next in the story. If there are subhead-

ings, they can also be used to guide students' understanding of the text. After reading, another strategy involves asking students to summarize what they have read. If they have understood the text, they will not have a problem offering a good summary of what they have read.

PRECAUTION(S)

Teaching L2 readers to increase comprehension levels takes time and patience because many L2 students will not only have different levels of prior knowledge of a topic, but also different knowledge of and experiences with their own L1. Therefore, Koda (2005) suggests when teaching the basic decoding process to L2 readers, reading teachers should also try to find out if (and how much) their students understand how their own L1 writing system works.

SCENARIO

Maria was teaching a reading course to her intermediate students in Spain, but her students' reading comprehension levels were not where they should be. She began her reading class by making sure that her students' prior knowledge and/or experience of the topic was fully activated by *brainstorming* the topic with them as they read the text. She asked the students to tell her everything they knew about the topic. She wrote all of this on the whiteboard until the board was filled with words. Most of what she wrote was related to the topic, but some was not. She listed everything because she wanted to know exactly what they thought was related to the topic. If her students showed that they already knew a lot about the topic, she asked students to define words on the board or to give analogies to make the concepts clearer. But if the brainstorming showed that they knew something about the topic but not a lot, then she provided examples, or defining characteristics,

using as many of the words they provided on the board as she could. She decided that she would present more information to her students about the topic to build on their knowledge, using examples from many sources.

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Maria’s class.
- In what ways can teachers increase reading comprehension levels?

—Strategy 1.5: Reflect on Reading Strategies

When we read, we all use some strategies like writing short notes, or highlighting some important points or other such ways of understanding what we are reading. Some of these strategies may be observable (such as the ones listed), but some may not (such as thinking about what we are reading or predicting about what may come on the following pages). Although there are no “good” or “bad” strategies, Papalia (1987) maintains that good readers make use of strategies such as these when they read:

- make connections to their own life
- make predictions
- draw inferences
- skip words they do not know
- make connections to other things they have read
- re-read to check for comprehension
- ask someone what a word means

Research also suggests that effective reading strategies can and should be taught to L2 students and that the students can benefit from such instruction (Carrell, 1998). Reading strategy instruction aims at improving the performance of readers through explicit, step-by-step demonstrations of good reading behaviors that include instruction in metacognitive strategies (Koda, 2005). Teachers can accomplish this by modeling good reading behaviors to their students. Thus, reading strategy instruction develops student knowledge about the reading process, introduces students to specific strategies, and provides them with opportunities to discuss and practice strategies while reading, although this takes a lot of time.

APPLICATION(S)

Anderson (1991: 468–469) maintains that “strategic reading is not only a matter of knowing what strategy to use,” but also the reader “must know how to use a strategy successfully and orchestrate its use with other strategies. It is not sufficient to know about strategies; a reader must also be able to apply them strategically.” Teachers can consider these steps when introducing reading strategies to their students (adapted from Winograd and Hare, 1988):

- Explain *what* the strategy is: Teacher should describe what the strategy is.
- Explain *why* a strategy should be learned: Students should be frequently reminded about the *benefits of the strategy* to help them become successful readers.
- *Model* the strategy for the students: Teachers should explain *how to use* the strategy effectively by modeling it. In other words, show the students how to do it.

- *Follow up on the training:* this requires many repetitions of the same strategy in different activities for it to become part of the students' reading process.

For reading strategy training to be effective, students must first be made aware of what strategies they currently use. As Carrell (1998: 8) points out, "If learners are not aware of when comprehension is breaking down and what they can do about it, strategies introduced by the teacher will fail."

PRECAUTION(S)

Teachers should remember that the ultimate goal of reading instruction is not to teach individual reading strategies but rather to develop strategic readers and that this takes a lot of time (Farrell, 2005). As such, and as Anderson (2005: 757) suggests, there must be an "active involvement of the L2 learner in their selection and use." This means that teachers must be willing to spend a lot of class time explaining, modeling, and reinforcing strategy use until students are able to implement them effectively by themselves while they are reading.

SCENARIO

Youngja wanted to teach her elementary EFL students some reading strategies to see if this would improve reading comprehension. She decided to first try to teach them how to predict while they are reading. In Youngja's next reading lesson, the students were told that the title of the short text they were going to read was "What Goes Around Comes Around." Then Youngja put this title on the OHT (overhead transparency).

Title: What Goes Around Comes Around!

What does the title mean?

What do you think this short story will be about? Why?

Many of the students said that they didn't really understand the title, and as such they said they could not tell her what the story will be about. So, Youngja distributed a copy of the first paragraph for each student to read to see if this would help them better understand the story.

Then when the students had finished reading the first paragraph, she divided the first paragraph into individual sentences on the whiteboard and asked them questions in which they had to make predictions in order to answer them correctly. An example of this was when Youngja wrote this following sentence on the whiteboard: *Now both were on his trail and so he purposely led them into an area of quicksand, an area he had grown up in and thus knew all too well.* She then asked the students to predict what will happen next by writing this question on the whiteboard: *What does this tell you what may possibly happen? Why?* She distributed each of the remaining paragraphs and asked her students to make similar prediction activities with each of the paragraphs.

//////////////////////////////////// **REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS** //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Youngja's class.
- What reading strategies should teachers teach and how should they teach them?

—Strategy 1.6: Reflect on Text Structures

When people read effectively and efficiently it means they can also recognize and follow a text's basic discourse organization (in many cases this is subconscious) and because of this,

they can also later recall more information from that particular text. Consequently, students who can recognize a text's discourse organization are better able to recall information from that text (Koda, 2005). Thus, when L2 students are able to recognize different types of texts, they not only better comprehend a text but they are better able to recall information from that text after reading it (Carrell, 1985, 1992). Consequently, teaching L2 students how texts are organized helps them with their reading.

APPLICATION(S)

These techniques (which should be further adapted to particular student needs) can help students recognize different types of text structure: *hierarchical summaries*, *concept maps*, *modified SQ3R strategy*, and *story maps* (Farrell, 2009):

- *Hierarchical summaries* are very useful for texts that have sections and subheadings. Students work alone or in pairs or groups to look at each section. Then they write the main point of each section (and supporting idea if time permits). They do this for each section until students have summaries of each section. Both teachers and students can review the summaries together.
- *Concept maps* show relationships among concepts within a specific field of knowledge. After students read the text, teachers ask them to write the main idea of the text in the center of a page and usually in the center of a circle or oval. Next, they draw several spokes that move straight from that circle or oval to make it look like a bicycle wheel. The major topics associated with the main topic are attached to the end of each spoke. Completed maps can be reviewed by the teacher and the students together.

- *Modified SQ3R strategy* is where the teacher asks the students to survey (*S*) the complete text including headings and subheadings. They then read the first subheading and recite (*R*) it without looking at it. Next, they ask themselves questions (*Q*) about the subheading and then re-read (*R*) the subheadings, and recite (*R*) the important ideas in the section and do the same of all the important ideas in each section.
- *Story maps* are useful for using with texts that have a story structure, such as *setting*, *problem*, *goal*, *events*, and *solution*. Simply, the teacher asks the students questions that focus on this story structure so that they will eventually be able to identify this story structure themselves and use it later in their written work.

PRECAUTION(S)

Because L2 students have such varied backgrounds in terms of their first language, teachers will have to specifically train their students how to recognize text organization in English for more effective reading comprehension. This is often best accomplished through teacher modeling.

SCENARIO

Candace, an English teacher in Spain, wanted to teach her advanced EFL students how to recognize the main idea of a text consisting of multiple paragraphs with multiple topic sentences. In previous lessons she had focused only on recognizing the main idea of one paragraph. In that case, her students had learned that the main idea of a paragraph is usually stated in the topic sentence of a paragraph. Now, however, Candace wanted her students to be challenged and to have to rely on a

combination of different reading strategies at the same time, such as predicting, prior knowledge, knowledge of text structure, skimming, scanning, and recognizing topic sentences. She asked her students to read this passage with the title purposely omitted.

(_____)

Running is not a new sport. People were doing it hundreds of years ago. These days many people run or jog each day as part of their exercise routine. However, some people run in races as their profession. These athletes have to be in very good shape physically in order to run these races. Runners know a good diet is important for their training. They try to eat very healthy foods, especially before a race. Every year, there are many long races in many parts of the world. One of the most famous of these races is held in Boston in the United States of America.

The Boston race is called the Boston Marathon. This is one of the oldest races in the United States. In 1985, more than 6,000 people ran in the Boston Marathon. They came from all over the world. In some races, the winners get large amounts of money. But for almost 100 hundred years, they got no money at all in the Boston Marathon. Recently, the winners were only awarded prize money.

Candace asked her students these questions about the reading:

- What would an appropriate title be?
- What is the main point of the passage?
- What is the main idea of the first paragraph?
- What is the main idea of the second paragraph?

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Candace’s class.
 - In what ways can teachers teach text structures in reading?
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—Strategy 1.7: Reflect on Vocabulary Building

Having a large vocabulary is a big advantage for any L2 reader because knowing the meaning of individual words can help with comprehension because as Eskey and Grabe (1988: 232) have suggested, good L2 readers can recognize their meaning “at a glance.” It seems logical that if students read a lot, then they will be exposed to many new words, and as a result, they will learn and retain a lot of these new words. In fact, research in L1 reading suggests readers will learn one to three new words out of every 20 new words that they are exposed to while reading. This is incidental learning. However, there is still a need to explicitly teach vocabulary. We can teach students how to use their guessing skills or look for clues in context to understand unfamiliar vocabulary they may encounter while reading just as first language readers sometimes do. In addition to including vocabulary practice at the word level, Folse (2004: 4–9) has noted that ESL/EFL teachers should also include set phrases (e.g., phrases of more than one word that do not change such as *in other words*), variable phrases (e.g., phrases that have some variation such as *it has come to my/our attention that...*), phrasal verbs (e.g., two or three words with the first always a verb such as *come about*), and idioms (e.g., the sum of the meanings of the individual words is similar to the meaning of the whole phrase such as *let the cat out of the bag*).

APPLICATION(S)

As language is made up of words and phrases, Folse (2004: 125) suggests that vocabulary activities that include these be part of every ESL/EFL lesson: “You should make a concerted effort to incorporate new vocabulary or review/recycle vocabulary in every lesson.” Toward that end, these steps can be applied in a variety of teaching and learning situations (adapted from Nation, 2003: 135–140).

- *Focus on the most useful vocabulary first.* The most useful vocabulary that second/foreign language students need to learn first is the 1,000 most frequent word families (see Nation, 2002, for a complete word list) of English because it covers almost 75 percent of common words in newspapers, academic texts, and novels and about 85 percent of all words common in conversation. The list contains many of the 176 function words (*a, the, of, because, could*). Beyond that, what is the most useful vocabulary will depend on the goals of the learner.
- *Focus on the vocabulary in the most appropriate way.* After looking at what words to teach, teachers should now consider how they should be instructed and learned. Nation (2003) again suggests that teachers use actual classroom time to directly and explicitly teach high-frequency words by asking students to read and listen to graded readers containing these words, asking them to study the words and do exercises based on them, and asking them to speak and write using these words.

Other suggestions by vocabulary experts such as Folse (2004) include asking students to keep a vocabulary log that personalizes their understanding of important vocabulary.

PRECAUTION(S)

Teachers must remember to give attention to the high-frequency words across the four skill strands of an English language program. Teachers need to ensure that the high-frequency words occur in a deliberate manner through teaching and study and are used in communication in listening, speaking, reading, and writing lessons.

SCENARIO

Sam, an English teacher in Canada, wanted to teach his basic students how to guess the meaning of words or phrases they have not seen before in a reading text. He decided on this approach because he noticed that his students were too dependent on their dictionaries when encountering a word they did not know. He prepared a lesson that he knew included a passage that contained vocabulary he knew his students did not know, and then he distributed it. The passage asked them to underline any words they did not understand but not to look up any in a dictionary. They were to continue to read until the end of the passage. To help the students understand the meaning of the words they did not understand, he first asked them to look at the part of speech of the unknown word (is it a noun, verb, adjective, etc.?). Next, he asked them to look at the clause or sentence in which the unknown word was located. If the word was a noun, then he told them to notice the adjectives that describe it or the closest verb, etc. He pointed them to other surrounding sentences, asking them to notice the relationship between the sentences and what might be signaled

in terms of cause and effect, or compare and contrast. Only after the students had done all of those things, could they try to guess the meaning of the word and to check their answers with the dictionary definition.

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Sam’s class.
- In what ways can teachers teach vocabulary?

—Strategy 1.8: Reflect on Developing Effective Reading Lessons

Teachers need to consider how to plan effective reading lessons that so that they can help move their students from a position of *learning to read* to one of *reading to learn* (Farrell, 2002). Planning for language lessons is different from other content lessons because the same concepts may need to be reinforced repeatedly using different methods, especially for beginning and intermediate-level students. Effective reading lessons will have specific instructional objectives that are achievable for the students within these lessons. Some of these objectives include developing students’ awareness of reading strategies necessary for successful reading comprehension, asking them to expand their vocabulary, developing their awareness of linguistic and rhetorical structures found in different reading texts, increasing their reading speed and fluency, and providing practice in extensive reading skills. For example, a specific lesson objective for a reading class could be written by the teacher as: *To enable the students to deduce the*

meanings of unfamiliar words in a text through the use of context clues. Then the teacher makes a lesson plan that attempts to fulfill this reading objective by designing activities so that students practice this during that lesson. In fact, Richards' (1990a) advocates that teachers not only plan specific instructional objectives for a particular reading class, but should also explain these objectives to the students before each lesson.

APPLICATION(S)

Teachers should introduce the lesson objective to the students at the beginning of the lesson and also encourage the students to activate their prior knowledge on the topic. This can be achieved by having students skim or scan the passage in order to generally orient them into the lesson. Next, the lesson should focus on the instructional objective—teaching a strategy or testing a strategy already taught—and this should occupy the majority of the class time. After the students have read and focused on the main part of the lesson, some closure is necessary to ease them out of the lesson. At this stage of the reading lesson, teachers can evaluate if their lesson has been effective or if it needs further reinforcement (in the form of assigned homework). Teachers should also consider what their students should be able to do at the end of a lesson, and this should be stated in observable, realistic, and achievable terms. For example, a teacher of reading might have as an achievable lesson how to notice how paragraphs are organized when reading a text. Specifically, it might be: At the end of the lesson, students should be able to organize a text into appropriate paragraphs, each with a main idea and supporting details.

It is important also for reading teachers to take some time to reflect on other materials or texts their students are asked to read because these materials may be useful to support the techniques and strategies within a reading lesson. In many cases the textbook may have already been chosen by the school (as in a set curriculum), but teachers can adapt these materials or choose supplementary ones, depending on the needs of their students and the purpose of the reading class.

PRECAUTION(S)

If the purpose of the reading lesson is pleasure reading, a completely different set of criteria may be more appropriate. For example, in reading for pleasure, students may self-select books based on their interests and proficiency levels. This is because self-selected books tend to be more motivating for individual students, while assigned textbooks are part of a course and cannot usually be tailored to individual interests.

SCENARIO

Yonghee, a novice Korean English teacher in her first year, wrote the reading lesson plan on page 26 for her intermediate EFL students.

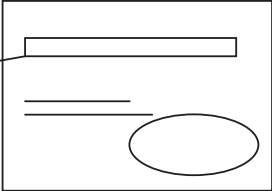
Lesson Plan: Reading

Text: Passage on the topic of “Winter Sports”

Lesson Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. identify topic sentences
2. predict the content of a paragraph from the topic sentence

| Time | Sequence | Activity | Objective |
|--------|---------------|--|--|
| 10 min | Pre-activity | <p>Show students article only with its title (“Winter Sports”), some graphics, headings, topic sentences, concluding sentence etc. With these cues, students are to predict the main content of the article.</p>  <p>The diagram shows a rectangular box representing an article layout. At the top is a horizontal rectangle labeled 'Title' with an arrow pointing to it. Below the title are two horizontal lines representing text. To the right of the second line is an oval shape representing a graphic.</p> | <p>Learn to pick up signposts from an article.</p> <p>Use these signposts (e.g., topic sentences) to predict content.</p> |
| 30 Min | Main Activity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher explains and models how to pick out topic sentence from para 1. Highlight that the topic sentence need not necessarily be the first sentence of a paragraph (use Para 1 to illustrate). 2. Class works with teacher on Para 2. 3. Work sheets will be given to students to identify the topic sentences of para 3 & 4. Individual work. Teacher asks for response after 10 min. 4. 2nd set of Worksheets: students to predict content from topic sentences (need not be from the Winter Sports article) In their groups, students will brainstorm and write down ideas. | <p>Identifying topic sentences.</p> <p>Prediction</p> |
| 20 Min | Post-activity | <p>Students will be shown the whole article of Winter Sports. Using the topic sentences they have identified earlier, summarize the article graphically — flowcharts, drawing, map, etc.</p> | <p>Recognizing topic sentences and use these discourse markers to organize content. May be a good way to introduce the next lesson on writing.</p> |

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example lesson plan from Yonghee’s class.
- What factors are important when making lesson plans for reading classes?

—Strategy 1.9: Reflect on Extensive Reading

In most reading classes, the teacher takes responsibility for choosing the materials that will be read in each lesson. These are most likely chosen with the overall goals of the reading course in mind, the proficiency level of the students, the content of the materials, the vocabulary, and so on. However, teachers rarely consult the students about the level of interest they may have in these materials and as such, many students consider reading lessons boring. One strategy to avoid this is to ask the students to choose their own reading materials and ask them to read them independently of the teacher. As Bamford and Day (2003: 1) suggest, students read for “general, overall meaning, and they read for information and enjoyment.” In fact, Bamford and Day (2003: 1) continue by stating that students “are then encouraged to stop reading if the material is not interesting or if it is too difficult.” This kind of reading is called *extensive reading* and is based on the theory that people learn to read by reading a lot of different types of interesting materials. Carrell and Carson (1997: 49-50) suggest that extensive reading “generally involves rapid reading of large quantities of material, for general understanding, with the focus generally on meaning of what is being read than on language.” Renandaya and Jacobs (2002) maintain that extensive reading also supports other aspects of an English language program because it improves reading and writing skills, as well as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and knowledge of text structure.

APPLICATION(S)

Day and Bamford (1998: 7–8) outline ten characteristics of an extensive reading approach for second language classrooms.

1. Students read as much as possible.
2. A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available.
3. Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading anytime.
4. The purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.
5. Reading is its own reward. There are few or no follow-up exercises after reading.
6. Reading materials are well within the linguistic competence of the students in terms of vocabulary and grammar.
7. Reading is individual and silent, at the student's own pace, and, outside class, done when and where the student chooses.
8. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower as students read books and other material they find easily understandable.
9. Teachers orient students to the goals of the program, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads, and guide students in getting the most out of the program.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader for the students.

One way of incorporating Items 1 to 3 is for a teacher to establish a class library. If you're setting up a library and want your students to read whatever they choose, ask each student

to bring one or two books to “donate” to the library. After a student has read his or her own book(s), he or she can make a brief presentation to the class about its contents and why others should read it. Thus begins the exchange of books, with each original owner being responsible to keep account of who is reading his or her book(s); this also reduces the time the teacher spends monitoring this process. One way of starting the sharing is to begin each class with a three-minute reading by a class member who has finished a book. The reading teacher should consider putting a time limit on the reading as some readers may read too slowly. This is a delicate issue because it is important not to push the students too much so as not to defeat the main purpose of extensive reading, which is reading extensively on their own.

PRECAUTION(S)

Each teacher should monitor the materials to ensure they are appropriate for the reading level in terms of difficulty and subject matter without specifically censoring the reading materials. Teachers should also try to make sure that students are reading a variety of reading materials—both fiction and non-fiction—and that they are not tested on them in the usual manner. Students should be encouraged to keep a reading log about the material they are reading so that they can draw on that information when discussing aspects of the book.

SCENARIO

Tom, an English teacher in Korea, wanted to get his advanced students to do more extensive reading, but he did not want to have to assess them in the usual manner, such as asking them to write a summary or to give a presentation. When he did that, he discovered that his students just read the blurb on the back of the book or just went to the internet for a summary.

He was never sure that they had actually read the book. So he asked groups of five students to read the same book (a book that all five agreed was interesting enough for each to read independently). Then he asked each group to imagine turning the book into a movie. The group would have to list the main characters in the story, decide who would act these roles in the movie, and explain why they choose a particular person for a particular role. Then the group would write an invitation letter for each actor, outlining the plot and telling the actor why he or she was chosen for that particular part. Finally, each group would design a poster for the movie and present everything to the class. In this way, Tom wanted to check (assess) that his students were in fact reading books extensively outside of class.

//////////////////////////////////// REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Tom's class.
 - In what ways can teachers encourage their students to read outside of class?
-

—Strategy 1.10: Reflect on Reading and Writing Connections

There has long been a research connection between reading and writing in L1. As Tierney and Pearson (1983: 568) maintain, “At the heart of understanding the reading/writing connection one must begin to view reading and writing as essentially similar processes of meaning construction.” Indeed, parents of children who were read to a lot when they were young have long recognized the advantage these children have when they begin to write in their L1. These advantages can be seen in terms of better spelling, better sentence construction, and

better overall organization of their writing at an early age. In L2 as well, research has suggested a close link between reading and writing, especially in academic contexts (Hirvela, 2004). Krashen (1993) too has long argued that reading is a basic requirement for good writing because it helps L2 students recognize grammatical and text structures that become rules for writing. This is called *reading to write*.

APPLICATION(S)

Teachers can engage in various practices when trying to make specific connections from reading to writing. One of the most popular is to model the reading-writing process by showing students how they can incorporate specific text structures in their writing. Another technique teachers can use is free or voluntary reading (Hirvela, 2004), which incorporates extensive reading activities (see Strategy 1.9). This can be combined with writing a reading journal (Zamel, 1992) where the students respond to what they have read extensively.

PRECAUTION(S)

Because reading and writing are usually taught in different classes as different skills, students sometimes do not consciously connect reading to writing and believe they are separate skills to be mastered at different times. It can therefore take a lot of effort by teachers to continuously make this connection for the students.

SCENARIO

Susan, an English teacher in the U.S., wanted to teach her intermediate students how to understand the use of signaling devices (discourse markers) that are used in texts. She wanted her students to be more aware of these devices so that they would not only better understand the text as they were read-

ing it, but so they would be better able to use them in their own writing. She first explained that discourse markers are words and phrases that join parts of a text together, just like the bands in a watch strap: without them, the watch band will fall off your wrist. Then she showed a chart that listed some discourse markers with their functions and explained their use.

| MARKER | FUNCTION |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>first, second, third, . . . last</i> | To make a list |
| <i>furthermore, moreover, what is more</i> | To add more to a list |
| <i>but, however, although</i> | To show contrast |
| <i>in order to, so that, so</i> | To state a purpose |
| <i>as a result, consequently, therefore</i> | To explain a result |
| <i>then, next, later, after a while</i> | To show a sequence |
| <i>finally, in conclusion, to sum up</i> | To summarize |

However, instead of teaching this as she usually did by asking students to underline the different discourse markers in the text or to do a fill-in-the-blank activity, she challenged her students by asking them to locate places in a text where they thought it would be most appropriate to place specific discourse markers. Susan wanted to push her students rather than to give them typical activities that she sometimes thought they carried out in a rather mindless manner.

//////////////////////////////////// **REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS** //////////////////////////////////////

- Comment on the example from Susan’s class.
 - In what ways can teachers teach discourse markers?
-

Chapter Questions

FOR REFLECTION

1. Define what reading means to you. How do you think your students (or potential students) define reading? Compare your (and your students') definition to that of Anthony, Pearson, and Raphael (1993) given on page 3. How might you reconcile any differences between the definitions? How important is it to do so? Why?

2. Consider the language level of your students or potential students. Which strategies would you use to teach reading to beginning-level students? To intermediate or advanced students? What types of materials and activities would be appropriate for each level?

3. Consider the teaching of reading strategies as discussed in Strategy 1.5. Which strategies do you think may be most important for L2 readers? When do you think it's appropriate to teach reading strategies? How might you integrate reading strategies into your current or future reading instruction?

4. The concepts of teacher modeling and repetition are mentioned several times throughout the chapter. What are the benefits of incorporating modeling in teaching L2 reading? Repetition? Are there any drawbacks to using these two concepts in the reading classroom?

5. What are the some of the challenges in establishing an extensive reading program?

6. Which strategies in this chapter do you think you would use/try first? Why?