

2011

Creating Avid Readers across Content Areas: Explicit Reading Instruction in the ESL Classroom

Rashmi Koushik
SIT Graduate Institute

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection

 Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Koushik, Rashmi, "Creating Avid Readers across Content Areas: Explicit Reading Instruction in the ESL Classroom" (2011). MA TESOL Collection. 510.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/510

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

**Creating Avid Readers across Content Areas:
Explicit Reading Instruction in the ESL Classroom**

By Rashmi Koushik

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching at the
School for International Training Graduate Institute,
Brattleboro, Vermont

August 2011

IPP Advisor: Susan Barduhn

The author grants the SIT Graduate Institute permission to reproduce or distribute this paper, in whole or in part, in either electronic or in print format.

©Rashmi Koushik, 2011. All rights reserved.

This project by Rashmi Koushik is accepted in its present form.

Date: September 2011

Project Advisor: Susan Barduhn

Project Reader: Murli Koushik

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank my wonderful professors at the SIT Graduate Institute for all their guidance and inquiry; they made me a better facilitator, listener, and cultural being. Thank you to my SMAT 26 cohort for all your energy, hard work and insight; you are a community of superb minds and playful souls. To my reader, my father, Murli Koushik, for always stepping in when I need you, and seeing me through what I started with encouragement; my mother, Vimala Koushik, for your persistence and unwavering faith in me; Abigail Healey, for making me the writer I am today; Megan Pugh, for all of our discussions on education, life and more – you are an inspiration to me; my colleagues at Renton Technical College and Bellevue College, for bringing all of this research home and into the classroom in such real ways; and to my partner, Henri-Bastien Lamontagne, for your understanding that I needed a big push, your sense of humor and tolerance of my taking time away from us to do this, even on trips. Special thanks to Susan Barduhn, for not giving up on me, and receiving me with encouragement and firm guidance.

Abstract

Colleges are experiencing budget crises on a paramount scale and are funding programs that place higher demands on students to be able to read academic texts in specific fields of study. Unfortunately, students are often overwhelmed with the level of reading and the types of content that they encounter. Even more often, L2 (Second Language) learners are often left out of academic reading instruction in the college-level ESL classroom, and therefore rarely advance into academic pathways. This paper seeks to define and articulate the use of explicit reading instruction to help L2 learners become better readers in English, particularly of more demanding texts. By providing them with reading strategies and modeling what good readers do, these students can make great gains in reading critically, mindfully, and across different areas of content. This in turn, will allow them to pursue academic pathways, and become more self-sufficient and successful. In this paper, I will include personal examples of my own ESL classroom, and include approaches to explicit instruction such as the Reading Apprenticeship model in order to illustrate models of reading instruction.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors:

Reading

Content Area Reading

Adult Literacy

Reading Apprenticeship

Content Area Reading

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction: What is Reading?	1
A Personal Context	1
What is Reading?	3
What Good Readers Do	5
Chapter 2: Why read? Six Reasons to Read	10
Chapter 3: How does this Translate into Instruction?	16
A Classroom Library	16
A Time and a Place for Reading	17
Teachers Must Stop Grading Everything	18
How to Read: Explicit Instruction	19
.....The Reading Apprenticeship Approach	20
Conclusion: A Seventh Reason for Reading Emerges	29
The Moral Compass	29
Appendices	32
..... A) Reading Strategies	32
..... B) Book Lists	36
Bibliography	39

Introduction: A Personal Context

If you make a student feel like a reader, he'll become a reader. – Donald Graves

It's early in the morning, and my advanced ESL students make their way to their seats. They shyly scan the agenda that I have posted on the whiteboard, many of them opening their notebooks to furiously copy it down. The first item on the agenda is "Choosing a reading for class."

I ask a question that I have often asked, "What kinds of things do you like to read?" I am met with 25 heads that suddenly find something infinitely fascinating on their desks. "Okay," I say, "what was the last thing you remember reading?"

A hand raises; it's Mario, a student from Chile. "I read the newspaper."

"Excellent!" I say. "Anyone else want to share what they read?"

"I don't really read." Replies Monica.

"Me neither. I can't remember what I read, especially books," grumbles Ion. Several others mumble similar responses.

"Okay, that's fine. But besides books, what else do you think you use your English reading skills to read every day?"

"Signs"

"Recipes"

“Email”

The responses flood in and I run to the whiteboard to write down this list.

“Comic books,” says one student.

“Great! -- I love comic books!” I agree with the student.

In a few minutes, we have a long list on the board, with everything from ads, sale signs, the drivers manual, and subtitles on it.

We stare for a moment at the board. I decide to mention the elephant in the room.

“How do you all feel about the idea of reading a book in class?” I ask the students. Eyes roll, students sigh dramatically. Most of them reexamine their desks again.

“But teacher, that’s so *hard!*” several of them exclaim.

“Let’s talk about that.” I say. “What’s hard about reading a book?”

“I don’t understand all the words,” says Rosita, “Then I get confused and forget what I just read.”

“I read the pages over and over again, and it’s like nothing goes in,” complains Aiden.

Many more students have similar protests.

“Well, what if I showed you what I do when I read – and then you can follow what I do until it starts to make more sense?” I ask.

Blank stares greet me. “What I mean is, I can read something and *show* you how I read by *telling you* what I think about *as* I read it.” Heads perk up. I have their attention.

And so it began. The truth is I was beginning a process myself.

As an ESL (English as Second Language) Instructor, I had never thought extensively about what it means to read – what my thought processes were, and what skills and background knowledge I was employing to make meaning from text. Even more puzzling is that I had never thought about when it was that somewhere in the course of my life, I had developed a love of reading. I would consider myself an “avid” reader. But before beginning this process with my students, I didn’t know what that meant.

The class I have just described is similar to most classes I have encountered in the last few years of my teaching. I began searching for approaches to teaching reading, in order to equip my students with the skills it would take to move beyond their ESL ceiling in the ranks of academia or the workforce. Moreover, I wanted to prepare them not only to be readers of assigned books, and to churn out quick answers to study guides, but to be able to read across the content areas that they would need to utilize for their programs: mathematics, biology, history, or psychology and to meet the demands for such courses head-on. I think, too, that somewhere in the middle of implementing this approach, my students learned to demystify reading and actually began to enjoy it.

What is reading?

Simply defined, “reading is a complex system of making meaning from text” (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). To most students in ABE (Adult Basic Education) or ESL classes, reading hinges on the word *complex*. Many students struggle with it for years, some even managing to stumble through high school and barely pass college-level

courses without ever really understanding how to read. As an instructor, I strongly believe that literacy is much more than reading and writing print text, even though that is largely what we assess in school. My work in becoming a more effective reading teacher is partly to move beyond “reading is decoding and fluency,” delving deeper into what it means to engage with the language, in text or other media.

Reading is more than “decoding”, the way in which we decode letters or words or sentences into the corresponding sounds that make up words and sentences. Decoding can look like someone knows how to read, but there is often a gap between knowing the letter-sound-word correspondence and knowing the meaning of those words, sentences, or longer piece of text. According to Daniels and Zemelman (2004), “beginning readers can learn which letters in English can make each of the 40 sounds used in the spoken language” (p. 22). However, the problem of adult learners is not knowing the sounds letters make, but content-level comprehension issues. Understanding how meaning is constructed from print is essential if teachers are to improve the comprehension of their students. Decoding is not comprehending. Certainly all good readers can recall a time when they were able to decode words, but did not understand what the words said. Maybe they were trying to read a legal document, like a tax form, or a home loan. Or perhaps it was a set of complex directions to install a program on their computer. To illustrate this point, try this text out:

In Daniels and Zemelman (2004):

The batsmen were merciless against the bowlers. The bowlers placed their men in slips and covers. But to no avail. The batsmen hit one four after another along with an occasional six. Not once did their balls hit their stumps or get caught (p.21).

Now take a moment to reflect on your reading of the passage. What did you notice about your thinking process? How was your comprehension? Your attitudes or feelings as you were reading? When I first read this passage, I found it a somewhat irritating experience. I read and re-read it and finally didn't get very far in my comprehension of it. But here's a hint: it's about cricket. Now, if you go back and read the passage again, it makes much more sense. However, it's important to note that while reading the above passage, there probably weren't letters you couldn't sound out, or words you'd never seen before. Whatever makes this passage hard to read goes beyond phonics, phonemics or decoding skills. How does one go from decoding these types of texts to understanding them? In order to move beyond decoding, readers need to employ reading strategies. Daniels and Zemelman, in their book, *Subjects Matter*(2004), describe some ways in which proficient readers work to make sense of text. In the following section, I will describe some of these methods and use examples to illustrate.

What Good Readers Do

Reading is an active, constructive process

(Daniels & Zemelman, p. 23)

If the test passage about cricket had been about teaching struggling adult immigrants in the U.S., we both probably would have sailed through it without stopping, with genuinely high comprehension, and with no particular awareness of our reading process. You might have “clicked” with the text, and it would have felt smooth and effortless. When we read a “hard” text, we don't necessarily click with it; making our process more conscious and visible – probably more clunk than click. As you were thinking back on the process, did you notice many stops and starts? You may have stopped and tried to make an educated guess (maybe it's a

game?), by comparing it to your own experience (is it like baseball?), looking for word roots or synonyms (maybe the slips aren't referring to underwear), or posing questions for yourself (what's a cover?). All of these mental acrobatics remind us that readers actively build and construct meaning from a text. The meaning does not simply reside on the page, ready to be understood.

Good readers have a repertoire of thinking strategies they use to comprehend texts (Daniels & Zemelman, p.23)

The tricks you may have used to make sense of the cricket text weren't random or spontaneous. You were drawing from a specific set of thinking skills that you have developed and used through your life as a reader. There are many ways to label these strategies. According to Zimmerman and Keene (1997) they are:

- To Visualize (make mental pictures or sensory images)
 - To Connect (connect to own experience, to events in the world, to other readings)
 - To Question (to actively wonder, to interrogate the text)
 - To Infer (to predict, hypothesize, interpret, draw conclusions)
 - To Analyze (to notice text structures, author's tone, vocabulary, point of view, theme)
 - To Recall (to retell, summarize, remember information)
 - To Self-Monitor (to recognize and act on confusion, uncertainty or attention problems)
- (p. 123)

Prior knowledge is the main determinant of comprehension (Daniels & Zemelman p. 25)

How much a reader already knows about the subject is probably the best predictor of reading comprehension. When readers engage with a text for which they have limited

background knowledge, the text is much more difficult to understand. When I showed the cricket passage to my father, who grew up in India and has been a life-long fan of the sport, he immediately knew what it was referring to and what the author was trying to say.

In order to utilize background knowledge, “a learner must be able to locate it and then apply it” (Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2009, p 2). This sounds straightforward, but there are many complexities behind such a statement. A teenager’s room is a good analogy here. As a teenager, my parents would remind me every day to take my backpack with me to school so I wouldn’t get locked out. They knew I had a backpack – they bought it for me themselves. But when I would go to my room to look for it, I couldn’t locate it, and therefore I couldn’t use it. The National Research Council’s report *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* describes this framework for how background knowledge supports new learning:

The new science of learning does not deny that facts are important for thinking and problem solving...However, the research also shows clearly that “usable knowledge” is not the same as a mere list of disconnected facts. Expert’s knowledge is connected and organized around important concepts (e.g., Newton’s second law of motion); and it supports understanding to other contexts rather than only the ability to remember (2000, p. 11).

Schema theory lies at the heart of mental organization, which is necessary for background knowledge to be useful. A schema “signifies a hierarchical representation of knowledge, connected to other related information” (McVee, Dunsmore & Gavelek, 2005, p. 3). For example, your knowledge of pizza includes its characteristics (food, round, dough, red sauce), types of pizza (pepperoni, cheese, vegetarian) and maybe even the regions famous for pizza (originates from Italy, New York has thin crust, Chicago is pan-style). In addition, this knowledge is connected to other schemata (sports events, fast food, restaurants, Italy).

Proficient readers not only have a good amount of background knowledge, they also know how to activate it – or open up that concept and all of the things that connect to that concept. They understand the relationship between one schema and other schemata; the better a reader can do this, the better the comprehension.

Reading is a Staged and Recursive Process

(Daniels & Zemelman, p. 28)

There are activities that skillful readers typically engage in *before* they start reading, other things they do *while* reading, and still other things they do *after* reading. Daniels and Zemelman (p. 30) describe this as a list:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Before Reading: | Set purpose for reading |
| | Activate prior knowledge |
| | Develop questions |
| | Make predictions |
| During Reading: | Sample text |
| | Visualize |
| | Confirm/Alter predictions |
| | Monitor comprehension |
| After Reading: | Recall/Retell |
| | Evaluate |
| | Discuss |
| | Reread |
| | Apply |
| | Read more |

These are activities that give us a base for how we can teach and model the reading process in our classes. We can set up a reading activity by helping students realize why they are reading something, they can ask themselves questions about what they know, and make predictions about what the reading will hold. We can help them to understand and engage with text types, sampling different genres of text, double-checking to see if their predictions came true, and if they are “getting it”. We can offer them peer discussion groups to talk through the text, and here students can ask each other questions and help each other get answers by rereading in the text. This framework gives us a place to start in developing a reading curriculum no matter what the content of the class may be.

Chapter 2: Why Read? Six Reasons to Read.

Reading is Rewarding

I became an English instructor in part because I love to read. In my ESL classes, I love each quarter when I can introduce my students to *White Fang*, *Black Beauty*, Rainsford and General Zaroff, Mme. Loisel, and Atticus Finch. Books are lifeblood to us, and I can't fathom a world without them. Anne Lamott, in *Bird by Bird*, captures this sentiment eloquently:

For some of us, books are as important as almost anything else on Earth. What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid, squares of paper unfolds world after world (1995, p. 15).

When we discover this fine, lyrical language Lamott speaks of, it is imperative that we bring it into the classroom to share with our students. As teachers, if we want students to turn out fantastically written essays and stories, we need to show them models of great writing. This is true for reading, too. Bringing in excellent examples of reading will enable our students to hone their abilities as both readers and writers. If great passages draw us in, they will draw our students in as well. Becoming an avid reader comes from knowing that reading not only brings us knowledge, but it can also bring us pleasure.

Reading Builds a Mature Vocabulary

The process to build a mature vocabulary is a long one, however. In *The Power of Reading*, Stephen Krashen says that “vocabulary is best developed through real encounters with the words in context, over time, and in small doses and time spent teaching vocabulary lists is

better spent doing free voluntary reading—which is more likely to result in word acquisition” (1993, p. 72). When I taught an advanced level ESL class in 2010, I had many students in the class who had a very good basic working vocabulary. They could whiz through any grammar assignment and complete a cloze exercise (one where the student fills in missing words in text, sometimes using a vocabulary word bank in order to do so) without batting an eye. However, their academic level – or their “reading” vocabulary – was quite underdeveloped, and moreover, they didn’t know how to work with unknown words in reading texts. We read a great deal that quarter: short stories, plays, and short novels. I noticed a change in not only how the students learned new vocabulary, but a *huge* difference in the sheer number of words they had learned and knew. It was far more than if I had structured many vocabulary lists and given quizzes every week (which I have done before). They approached vocabulary differently, too. We had discussed the power of reading and getting the meaning of a word in context. I modeled this for them over and over again and this was essentially the only way that several of them broke their dependence on reaching for their dictionary every time they didn’t know a word. They noticed that when they weren’t taking three minutes out of every five looking words up, their general comprehension went up, they became more interested in what they were reading and began making larger connections with the text. This process, which was partly experimental on my part, taught me a great deal about how I would “teach” vocabulary in future classes – by simply having my students engage in sustained silent reading in class.

Reading Makes You a Better Writer

Krashen (1993) also states that the research “strongly implies that we learn to write by reading” (p. 72-73). Carol Booth Olson, in *The Reading/Writing Connection* notes, “reading and writing have been thought of and taught as opposites – with reading regarded as receptive and

writing as productive” (p17). But researchers have found, Olson notes, that reading and writing are “essentially similar processes of meaning construction” and that readers and writers “share a surprising number of characteristics” (2011, p. 17). Olson observes that:

- Both readers and writers actively engage in constructing meaning from and with texts.
- Both move back in order to go forward in a recursive process.
- They interact and negotiate with both reading and writing – that is, they keep writing in mind when reading, and reading in mind, when writing.
- They use a common toolkit of cognitive strategies – planning and setting goals, tapping prior knowledge, asking questions, making connections, summarizing, monitoring, revising meaning, reflecting and evaluating.
- They use skills automatically when they are proficient (Olson, p. 17 – 22).

Reading is Hard, and “Hard” is Necessary

We all have students in our classes who give up easily when faced with difficult reading. Often these students will read a difficult passage one time, find it hard, and look to the teacher immediately for help. As a teacher, I quickly discover who these students are almost within the first week of the class. I’m not sure if they have been in classes previously with teachers who made the readings easier when they complained, but with me, they find out that there is little help to be sought through giving up. I believe that we must keep students from “learning helplessness” by emphasizing the necessity and beauty of hard work. Sheridan Blau, former president of the National Council of Teachers of English stresses that students must be taught to embrace confusion. Says Blau: “Confusion is necessary before real learning can occur. If you are reading something unchallenging, you might be entertained, but you limit what you learn” (Gallagher 2003, p. 23). He argues that rather than shutting down and giving up when reading

becomes confusing, students need to learn that comprehension of difficult texts does not occur instantaneously (p.23).

We must teach students that it's okay to not understand something the first time they read it. It's the "hard" that makes comprehending difficult reading so great. I have read books like *To Kill a Mockingbird* many times. I have taught it either in segments or in whole in my class for a few years now. Yet, I still don't completely understand it. Every time I read it, I see something new. Each time, I begin to understand motivations more clearly; I feel differently about different characters; I empathize more with Boo Radley, a central character who watches over the street where the other characters live, but never leaves his house. I can understand sometimes, why he chose to be a shut-in; and I can see more about what it was to grow up in a small town in Alabama during the Great Depression. It's this reading and re-reading that give me more insight into the text. Every time I read it, it is an enriching experience. It would be ridiculous of me to hand out a book like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and expect someone to read it once – in their second language – and understand everything the book has to offer. Instead, what is reasonable for me to expect is that they will try to understand it, and, with a toolbox of comprehension strategies and activities, they may eventually see the value of reading something challenging.

Reading Opens the Door to College and Beyond

The Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, in a report called *Increasing Student Achievement for Basic Skills Students* (Report 08-1, 2008, p.1-4), states that

“Community and Technical Colleges, with their open doors, are major gateways into postsecondary education for a wide variety of students...Relatively few basic skills students (ESL and ABE/GED) advance beyond the basic skills in their education.”

Most colleges are pushing hard for instructors to transition basic skills students into college-level programs. In the above report, research on a “tipping point” has found that at least one year of college credit, and a credential – a certificate or a degree -- is the point at which their income “tips”. In other words, it is the threshold where a student begins to make larger gains in jobs beyond ones with entry-level earnings. A lack of proficiency in reading is often what keeps students from attending college, and making the transition into getting a credential, an Associate’s Degree or a 4-year degree. Most academic courses are simply too challenging in terms of the reading they require for most students at the basic skills level. A similar longitudinal study by David Prince and Davis Jenkins called *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students* notes:

“Only 13 percent of the students who started in ESL programs went on to earn at least some college credits. Less than one-third (30 percent) of adult basic education (ABE/GED) students made the transition to college-level courses. Only four to six percent of either group ended up getting 45 or more college credits or earning a certificate or degree within five years” (Community College Research Center Brief, 2005, p. 1-3).

Reading is the key to providing these students with the skills to succeed in college-level courses, and eventually, in the workplace. “In this world you go to war every day, and short of becoming a millionaire, a very good education is your best armor” (Murnane & Levy, 1996, p.7).

Reading well is the core of that armor.

Reading Arms You Against Oppression

In Gallagher's book *Reading Reasons*, she states that she was once told by a consultant in the California Department of Education that the governor's office looks at fourth-grade reading scores to determine how much money the state needs to allocate for building future prison space (2003, p. 35). The thinking goes, I assume, that if fourth-grade reading scores are low, we can expect more prisoners ten years from now and that we should start building additional prisons in anticipation of that need. In other words, according to the California State Governor's office, students in elementary school who can't read very well have a much greater chance of being incarcerated later in their lives.

As an instructor of adults who are from all over the world, with different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, it is difficult to imagine that good reading instruction is all students really need to better their lives. However, as their instructor in community college, I may be their last chance to develop a level of proficiency that will enable them to fend for themselves, and to avoid the oppression that often afflicts the uninformed in our society. We are thickly entwined in an information age where the amounts of information we are expected to sift through is ever-expanding. Weak readers in this age will be left behind. James Baldwin was right when he said "It is expensive to be poor." Beyond simple economics, Baldwin was getting at the notion that poor people – often undereducated – are quickly taken advantage of. The best way to arm our students against being taken advantage of is to teach them how to read the world

critically – to teach them how to read the advertiser who is trying to get them to spend their money unwisely; to read the politician who is intentionally clouding the issue in the news; to read the ballot proposition that affects their neighborhood. In the next chapter, I will begin to discuss what systematic reading instruction might look like in the classroom.

Chapter 3: How Does This Translate Into Instruction? The Practical Applications

A Classroom Library

I have taken entire classes of mine to the school library, insisting that they each leave with at least one book that they plan to read over the quarter. I was successful at getting students to check out a large number of books, but I was not successful at turning these students into readers. There is something about a teacher’s mandating a library visit that reeks of coercion. Most of the students were not motivated to read the books; they were checking them out because I wanted them to.

I began assembling a classroom library in order to make students feel more comfortable around books. I brought my own personal books from home, others I had “found” in the teacher’s book exchange on campus, and I encouraged students to bring books from home or the library that they enjoyed. I insisted that any book would do – it didn’t have to be an “academic” book. I acquired a small collection of children’s books, comic books, teen novellas, cookbooks, books about travel and some books by popular authors like Dean Koontz, JK Rowling, and Stephanie Meyer. The result? Students began reading more. “There is something powerful that happens when books are brought to the students, when teachers take time to talk the books up, when students are immersed daily in print” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 5). Jeff McQuillian, in *The Literacy Crisis*, makes a strong case with a simple equation:

More books = more reading = better reading (1998, p.138)

See Appendix B at the end of this paper for high-interest reading titles for ESL students in beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.

A Time and a Place for Reading

Putting good books in the hands of a student is crucial, but it will do very little unless the student has a time and place to read. Some of my students have time to read at home, but they don't have a place. Others have a place, but no time. The vast majority of immigrant adults in my classes were so busy outside of school with one or more jobs, families and children that they had neither a place nor the time to read outside of the classroom. I used to tell my students that getting to class was half of what they would learn in that quarter. If they could simply be there, they would get the instruction, classmate support, and time to spend on learning this language and becoming better readers. Implementing time in class to do SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) is the second crucial building block to getting students trained as readers. Why do I take time *in class* for students to actively engage in reading? Imagine a college basketball team. The coach takes the time to identify the greatest needs and sets up training and drills in order to strengthen the players in those areas. It would be ludicrous for the coach to say, "Hey team, here are the plays we're going to do. Now make sure you go home and practice all these plays on your own, and I'll see you on game day." Yet, that is what we do when we assign most reading to be done at home. Reading at home, and having assigned reading to do at home is important. But it can't be the entire foundation of time to read. Reading in class gives students a time to read where they can ask me or other classmates about a particular confusing point that needs clarification. It also gives them the opportunity to see others – their peers and myself – reading. Having models

all around you when you engage in an activity helps immensely in knowing what and how to do something. The next section will talk a bit about how much reading students need to engage in, and how much they need to be assessed while they read.

Teachers Must Stop Grading Everything

Picture yourself during spring break. You are at some far away, exotic location. You have brought with you something deliciously trashy to read, a guilty pleasure you have saved for this moment. You sit down on the beach and crack open your just-for-fun book. You begin to relax and get into the first chapter when suddenly a dreaded former English teacher appears out of nowhere and comes up to you saying, “I love that book! Let me grade your comprehension as you read it! Since it may take you a few hours to finish, I’ll come by every 30 minutes with a quiz for you. When you finish, I’ll give you an exam to see how well you understood it. After that, maybe you can write a paper or give a presentation to talk about what you learned.”

My guess is that your enjoyment of the book would quickly disappear. It is somewhat counter-productive when someone wants you to enjoy reading, but then insists on assessing your understanding of it at every turn. It is imperative that in a classroom environment, there be books that students read for fun. The Catch-22 is that in order for students to improve on their reading, they must read a lot. Reading a lot means that I have to assess a lot of their comprehension all the time. Therefore, students can’t read more than I can assess. Wrong! If I want my students to become avid readers, I need to let go of the belief that I need to grade everything, particularly if I am trying to get them to see that reading is fun. I want students to be reading more than I can assess. These building blocks—allowing more access to high-interest reading material,

providing a time and place for reading, and placing less emphasis on grading work in concert together. They are effective only when applied simultaneously, when they are visited and revisited, when they overlap. Alone, each is ineffective. Together, they form an important foundation for bringing reading into the classroom.

How to Read: Explicit Instruction

In the quest to maximize students' academic growth, one of the best tools available to educators is explicit instruction, a structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills. It is called explicit because it is an unambiguous and direct approach to teaching that includes both instructional design and delivery procedures (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p 1-22). Explicit instruction is characterized by a series of supports or scaffolds, whereby students are guided through the learning process with clear statements about the purpose and rationale for learning the new skill, clear explanations and demonstrations of the instructional target, and supported practice with feedback until independent mastery has been achieved. Initial practice is carried out with high levels of teacher involvement; however, once student success is evident, the teacher's support is systematically withdrawn, and the students move toward independent performance. Rosenshine (1987, p. 34) described this form of instruction as "a systematic method of teaching with emphasis on proceeding in small steps, checking for student understanding, and achieving active and successful participation by all students".

In the method of explicit instruction that I have used in the classroom, I discovered the Reading Apprenticeship Model to teaching reading. In this model, the relationship between the student and reading is closely examined and documented in a series of *reading histories* wherein the students describe and do short writings about what they read, what they liked to read, didn't

like to read, and their earliest memories of reading or being read to. They also discuss someone in their life who made an impact on their reading – a parent, teacher or other role model that played some part – however small—in inspiring the student in reading. This primary history is important because it serves as a jumping board for where the student starts their journey in apprenticing as a reader. When I have used reading histories in class, students often discovered memories of reading that were pleasant, comforting and agreeable – which often differs from memories that are more current. Against this background, the students engage in reading in class where the classroom teacher serves as *master reader* to his or her *student apprentices*. The approach uses the teacher as a model, building and filling in the skills that a student may not have and making the thinking process of reading transparent and explicit. In the next section, I will illustrate in more depth the framework of the Reading Apprenticeship approach and its major components of explicit instruction.

The Reading Apprenticeship Approach

The Reading Apprenticeship or RA model describes four key dimensions of classroom life that are necessary for reading development. Figure 1 below describes the relationships between these dimensions.



Figure 1

This framework, found in *Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms* (Schoenbach & Greenleaf, 1999, p.22), describes each dimension as follows:

- Social Dimension: community building in the classroom, including recognizing the resources brought by each member; this dimension creates a safe environment for students to be open about their reading difficulties.
- Personal Dimension: developing individual identities and self-awareness as readers as well as their purposes for reading and goals for reading improvement
- Cognitive Dimension: developing reader's mental processes, including their problem-solving strategies

- Knowledge-building Dimension: identifying and expanding the kinds of knowledge readers bring to a text and further develop through interaction with that text

Metacognitive Conversation at the Center

At the center of these interacting dimensions, and tying them together, is an ongoing conversation in which the teacher and students think about and discuss their personal relationships to reading, the social environment, their cognitive activity, and the kinds of knowledge required to make sense of the text. This *metacognitive* conversation is carried on both internally, as teacher and students individually read and consider their own mental processes, and externally, as they talk about their reading processes, strategies, knowledge resources, motivations and interactions with texts.

Metacognition, simply put, is thinking about thinking: it's developing the self-awareness of one's thinking processes as they are happening. The four dimensions of classroom life that support reading are linked by the key enterprise of talking together about making sense of texts. Through metacognition, apprentice readers begin to become aware of their reading processes and, indeed, that there are reading processes. Through many means – classroom discussions between teachers and students, small-group conversations, written private reflections, reading logs, and personal letters to the teacher or to characters in the book – students can begin to know – and use and further develop – their own minds.

These conversations, if they become routine, offer students on-going opportunities to consider what they are doing as they read, how they are trying to make sense of the text and how well the strategies are serving them. Furthermore, the social, personal, cognitive and knowledge-

building dimensions of classroom life are linked by metacognitive conversation, and each of these dimensions is described in the next section.

The Social Dimension: Creating a Reading-Inquiry Community

Establishing a reading apprentice classroom begins with the work of nurturing a social environment in which students can begin to reveal their understandings and their struggles as well as to see other students and their teacher as potential resources for learning. To begin developing this social dimension, teachers work with students to create the sense that they are part of a safe community of readers. They must feel comfortable expressing points of confusion, disagreement and even disengagement with texts.

Motivation to read and to work on improving reading is intimately related to students' cultural and peer group identity. The degree to which students see doing well academically as a means of gaining status with their peers varies. For some students, a stigma might be attached to reading better than others in their social group. Others may be embarrassed by reading comprehension difficulties, believing that these difficulties mean they are not as skilled as they should be. Making it safe for students to discuss reading difficulties mitigates their potential embarrassment. Here are some strategies that help teachers establish the social dimension in a reading apprenticeship classroom:

Creating Safety

- Talk about what makes it safe or unsafe to ask questions or show their confusion in class

- Agree on group norms or classroom rules for discussion so that all students can share their ideas and confusions without being made to feel inadequate.

Investigating the Relationship Between Literacy and Power

- Investigate and talk about the people who read in our society; what they read, why they read and how reading affects their lives.
- Investigate and talk about the people who don't read in our society, and how not reading affects their lives.
- Talk about the relationships between literacy and power of various kinds, including economic, political and cultural power.

Sharing Book Talk

- Share the books teachers and classmates have found exciting, fun, interesting or important.
- Share the ways teachers and classmates choose books they will enjoy and be able to finish for recreational reading.

(Strategies from Schoenback & Greenleaf, 1999, p. 26)

The Personal Dimension: Creating a Sense of Agency

The personal dimension in the Reading Apprenticeship framework involves addressing ESL students' needs and interest in exploring new aspects of their own identities as readers. In the article, *Apprenticing Students to Reading in Subject-Area Classrooms* by Ruth Shoenbach (2003, p.135), one teacher develops the personal dimension by "helping his students build fluency and stamina with supported independent reading." As part of their daily SSR (Sustained

Silent Reading), his students “respond to metacognitive prompts in their reading logs that help them deepen their thinking about their own reading process and about the ideas in the text they are reading” (2003, p. 136). Early in the year the prompts start out easier, like “I started to think about _____,” or “An image I had in my mind was _____.” By midyear, students’ prompts are expanded to include critical responses to the text: “If I could, I would change the part about _____,” or “I finally understood _____” (Shoenbach, 2003, p. 135). Over time, the students read more and select from a wider array of books for independent reading, thereby building confidence and range.

The Cognitive Dimension: Developing a Comprehension Toolkit

The cognitive dimension in the Reading Apprenticeship framework involves developing students’ repertoire of specific comprehension and problem-solving strategies, with an emphasis on group discussion of when and why particular cognitive strategies are useful. Students who are mastering this dimension often stop reading in order to answer the teacher’s questions; rather, they read in order to answer their own questions. Through personal and social activities that engage students and teachers in thinking about and sharing their reading processes, the different ways readers approach reading begin to emerge. To begin, strategies such as skimming, scanning, and reading ahead all give students a view of the whole text, even though particular aspects of it may need later clarification. Part of this strategic approach to texts is to help students live with ambiguity and confusion and help them understand that they do not have to comprehend everything immediately. They can work on problem spots in the text, perhaps with some problem-solving strategies, after they get a glimpse of the text as a whole. Teachers can model and guide students in practicing these ways of approaching difficult texts. Some

strategies to do this are outlined in *Reading for Understanding* (Shoenbach & Greenleaf 1999, p. 33):

Getting the Big Picture

- Skim or scan texts
- Read past/through ambiguity or confusion
- Read ahead to see if the confusion clears up

Breaking it Down

- Chunk texts into small segments: for example, break complex sentences into component clauses
- Employ close reading of texts (linking interpretations to specific textual evidence)

Monitoring Comprehension

- Check to see whether comprehension is occurring
- Test understanding by summarizing or paraphrasing the text or self-questioning
- Decide whether to clarify any confusions at that point in time

The Knowledge-Building Dimension: Tapping and extending knowledge of content and text

This dimension in the framework involves identifying and expanding the knowledge students bring to a text, including knowledge about text structure, about topics and content, about word structure and meaning, and about discourse patterns and signals. The last of these refers to the particular ways ideas are organized and expressed in different disciplines and to the various

genres within each discipline. Like many other factors in reading, knowledge both supports reading comprehension and develops as a result of reading. In order for students to become proficient at reading to learn, they need to know something about the topics they will encounter in the text if they are to make connections to the ideas and elaborate their prior understandings.

Research on proficient readers' mental processes has led to some key modern understandings about how the mind works, about how people think, even about what we use to think. In *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (R. Anderson, 1992, p. 486-493), they describe studies in the 1970s that began to demonstrate how readers interact with texts, bringing their own stores of knowledge into play as they attempt to shape possible text meanings. Readers do not passively absorb information from the text, but rather they actively mobilize their own knowledge structures to make meaning in interaction with the text.

Readers call up whole worlds of knowledge and associations as they read, triggered by particular ideas, words or situations. These knowledge structures are known as *schemata* (R. Anderson), "Role of the Reader's Schemata" in *Theoretical Models of Processes of Reading* (p. 490). Schemata for particular networks of knowledge and information are activated as individuals read and add to their existing schemata as they encounter new information. I mentioned schemata associations earlier in this paper when I talked about how the single word, *pizza* can trigger an entire network of associations, such as types of pizza, regions that serve pizza, toppings, etc.

Knowledge can be stored in other ways, as well, for example, as *grammars* for particular kinds of texts. Proficient readers of children's stories will have a *story grammar* that enables them to predict what may unfold after "Once upon a time" (Schoenbach, p. 34). Knowledge can

also be stored as a *script* for an event with a well-known and predictable structure, such as eating out in a restaurant. From previous experiences in restaurants, individuals have a script of walking into a restaurant, being seated and given menus. They are therefore not surprised when a person approaches with a small pad of paper and asks, “Have you decided yet?” (Schoenbach, p. 35).

In a Reading Apprenticeship classroom, teachers assist students to activate appropriate schemata for particular texts, and to recognize the grammars or scripts that they know. In order to mobilize schemata, teachers might do several types of pre-reading activities, or text summaries that the students connect with before beginning the reading. This might also involve a discussion that targets certain misconceptions or competing information that students have, so that students can identify and relinquish knowledge structures that are not helpful or important. After pre-reading activities, it is important for students to understand the different ways texts are structured. Proficient readers use their awareness of the text structure to understand the key points of a text, and when they report back what they recall, their summaries reflect the text structure. An example of this might be someone who doesn’t understand that an expository text must be read differently than a narrative one. Understanding these genres and clearly explaining the difference in class is crucial to students’ activation of schema and will guide them how to read. Examples of some reading strategies and worksheets I have used can be found at the end of this paper in Appendix A.

Conclusion: A Seventh Reason for Reading Emerges

The Moral Compass

I recently heard a show on NPR that spoke of the beauty of getting lost in a book. The host said, “reading allows us to build empathy for people we don’t know, for lives we haven’t lived.” The quote struck me so strongly that I recorded it into my phone. I thought to myself, “Of course! Reading is a moral act.” This was particularly personal for me because I had just finished reading *Romeo and Juliet* with my class. Watching my students struggle with the text and yet, be willing to continue struggling because they were interested in it was a wonderful experience. While the language itself posed challenges, the real value of this text lay in our examination of the characters’ motives, behavior, ethical dilemmas, and choices they made. It requires us to wrestle with our own humanness, our morality. In reading *Romeo and Juliet*, we are confronted with questions like,

Does violence solve problems?

Can long-term feuds last forever? Can they ever be surmounted?

Are there times when secrets should be told?

Is teenage love real? Is love at first sight possible?

Is suicide ever a reasonable option?

Are you the agent behind your own life, or is there some greater force involved?

How much say should parents have about whom their children date?

These are just a few examples of the questions my students – and I – grappled with in our reading. The beauty was in that grappling – and the uproarious discussions we had regarding some of these questions and characters. There *is* a reason that people have been reading *Romeo and Juliet* for over 400 years, and it is not simply because it's a romance. The play's popularity has endured because the questions are as relevant today as they were in 1594.

Descartes said, “The reading of all great books is like conversation with the finest men of past centuries.” When our students read about Atticus Finch, they will converse about racism; when they read *The Great Gatsby*, they will converse about materialism, ambition, and greed. But big ideas are certainly not limited only to literature. I am hoping for my students to read Einstein, Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and others. When our students read, they are finding their way for themselves by joining the human conversation. If they read the *New York Times*, or the *Washington Post*, they are confronted with questions like *Should the US take a more active role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? How long should the war in the Middle East continue? Should obese people be able to deduct out-of-pocket expenses from their taxes for weight-loss efforts? Are enough underrepresented students gaining admission to our best universities? Will the Yankees win the World Series again this year?* (Okay, this isn't a moral question, but it leads to vociferous discussion in our classes nevertheless).

Some of these questions are more important than others, and some will be more relevant to our students, but development of our moral compass never ends. Even as proficient readers, we are constantly fine-tuning our knowledge and our values whenever we read a book, newspaper, or peruse a thoughtful magazine. Great writing matters, and by examining great works, teachers and students alike are provided rich opportunities to wrestle with universal ethical and moral dilemmas – the same dilemmas humans faced centuries ago, and the same

dilemmas our great-grandchildren will face. The idea that reading great works develops our moral compass has been on my mind ever since I made the decision to begin teaching it in my ESL classes. I also believe – and have seen -- that it is through reading that my students will become readers, and this is my own great lesson in the work that I have done and will continue to do as an instructor.

Appendix A: Reading Strategies

Double-Entry Reading Journals

Double-entry diaries (DEDs) are similar to the Cornell method of taking notes – dividing a page in half vertically with questions and main ideas on the left and specific information on the right. However, a DED is more flexible and can be used in a multitude of ways. You get to choose how you want students to structure their thinking, while students get to show you what they are thinking. In the left-hand column, students copy sentences or words directly from the text. They should also include the page number. In the right-hand column, students write down their inferential and critical thinking about the word, sentences or summary they wrote on the left-hand side. Here is an example:

<u>Direct quote from the text and page number</u>	<u>Thinking options</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reminds me of • I wonder • I infer • This is important because • I am confused because • I will help myself by • The picture in my head looks like • I think this means

Comprehension Constructors

A comprehension constructor often requires readers to use higher-order thinking and is typically introduced after students know how to mark text and use a double-entry diary.

Essentially, it's a worksheet I design to guide my students through difficult text using a particular comprehension strategy. Here are some examples I have used:

<p><u>What are you thinking?</u></p> <p>What are you wondering?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>What do you think might be a possible answer to your question?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>What connections can you make?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Text –to-Self Connections

In the space below, copy a sentence or two from the text and then write down the connections you made between the quotations and your own life. Be as specific as possible:

1. Text quote:

This reminds me of...

2. Text quote:

This reminds me of...

3. Text quote:

This reminds me of...

Appendix B: Book lists for ESL students

High Beginning

1. *The Evolution of Capurnia Tate*

By Jacqueline Kelly

In central Texas in 1899, eleven-year-old Callie Vee Tate is instructed to be a lady by her mother, learns about love from the older three of her six brothers, and studies the natural world with her grandfather, the latter of which leads to an important discovery.

2. *My Abuelita*

By Tony Johnston; illustrations by Yuyi Morales

With lyrical language and a sprinkling of Spanish, a young boy tells us about his amazing grandmother. The eye-catching, pastel-colored illustrations created in mixed media enhance this story of a much-loved grandmother.

3. *Pippi Longstocking*

By Astrid Lindgren; illustrations by Lauren Child; translated by Tiina Nunnally

This book is a new translation of the adventures of Pippi, a young girl with strength and imagination, who lives with her horse and monkey without adult supervision. The artwork is cleverly integrated into the text.

Low Intermediate

1. *When You Reach Me*

By Rebecca Stead

2010 John Newbery Medal winner

A 12-year-old girl in New York tries to make sense of a series of mysterious notes received from an anonymous source that seems to defy the laws of time and space.

2. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

by Grace Lin

2010 John Newbery Medal honoree

Chinese folklore and original storytelling combine with beautiful illustrations in this magical tale of a girl, a dragon and a quest.

3. *Number the Stars*

By Lois Lowry

During the German occupation of Denmark in 1943, 10-year-old Annemarie shows great courage when she helps her Jewish friend escape from the Nazis.

High Intermediate

1. *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*

By Deborah Heiligman

A biographical love story of Charles Darwin and his cousin Emma Wedgwood, who have a successful marriage despite fundamental philosophical and religious differences. Emma, strong in her religious faith, shapes her husband's theories of evolution.

2. *Return to Sender*

By Julia Alvarez

When his family hires migrant Mexican workers to help save their farm, 11-year-old Tyler befriends the oldest daughter and discovers they may not be in the country legally.

3. *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*

By Langston Hughes; illustrations by Brian Pinkney

Langston Hughes selected this collection of poems, first published in 1932, especially for young readers. From "The Dream Keeper" to "The Weary Blues" to "As I Grew Older," these poems reflect Hughes' pride in his race, yet provide universal themes and messages for all young people.

High/Advanced

1. *To Kill a Mockingbird*

By Harper Lee

A lawyer's advice to his children as he defends the real mockingbird of Harper Lee's classic novel—a black man charged with the rape of a white girl. Told through the young eyes of 9 year old Scout and Jem Finch, the book explores racism in the South in Alabama during the Great Depression.

2. *Fahrenheit 451*

By Ray Bradbury

The story of Guy Montag, a firefighter whose job it was to burn books...because that's what they were for. He never questioned whether this was the right thing to do until he met a 17-year old girl and a professor who told him of a past and a future that were different.

3. *Romeo and Juliet*

By William Shakespeare

Two feuding houses, the Montagues and the Capulets, had two teenagers who fell in love. The story that unfolds is about their love in the face of certain war between the two families, and the consequences that happen as a result.

4. *Seedfolks*

By Paul Fleischman

A vacant lot, rat-infested and filled with garbage, looked like no place for a garden. Especially to a neighborhood of strangers where no one seems to care. Until one day, a young girl clears a small space and digs into the hard-packed soil to plant her precious bean seeds. Suddenly, the soil holds promise: To Curtis, who believes he can win back Lateesha's heart with a harvest of tomatoes; to Virgil's dad, who sees a fortune to be made from growing lettuce; and even to Maricela, sixteen and pregnant, wishing she were dead. Thirteen very different voices -- old, young, Haitian, Hispanic, tough, haunted, and hopeful -- tell one amazing story about a garden that transforms a neighborhood.

Bibliography

Daniels, H., & Zemelman, S. (2004). *Subjects matter: every teacher's guide to content-area reading* (pp. 1-45). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2009). *In a reading state of mind: brain research, teacher modeling, and comprehension instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Gallagher, K. (2003). What Readers Do. In *Reading reasons: motivational mini-lessons for middle and high school* (pp. 1-67). Portland, Me.: Stenhouse.

Increasing Student Achievement for Basic Skills Students. (2008). *Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges*, 08(01), 1-4.

[Introduction]. (2011). In A. L. Archer & C. A. Hughes (Authors), *Explicit instruction: effective and efficient teaching*. New York: Guilford Press.

Keene, E. O., & Zimmermann, S. (2007). *Mosaic of thought: the power of comprehension strategy instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Krashen, S. D. (1993). *The power of reading: insights from the research*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

Lamott, A. (1995). *Bird by bird: some instructions on writing and life*. New York: Anchor Books.

McQuillan, J. (1998). *The literacy crisis: false claims, real solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

McVee, M. B., Dunsmore, K., & Lapp, J. (2000). How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School. *National Research Council*, 1-11.

Olson, C. B. (2011). *The reading/writing connection: strategies for teaching and learning in the secondary classroom*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Schoenbach, R. (1999). A Reading Apprenticeship Framework. In *Reading for understanding: a guide to improving reading in middle and high school classrooms* (pp. 1-137). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shoenbach, R. (2003). Apprenticing Students to Reading in Subject-Area Classrooms. 128-135.