

MAKING STUDENTS COMPREHEND NARRATIVE TEXT WITH RETELLING STRATEGY

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Abstract

This paper reveals an alternative model for teaching reading narrative text using retelling strategy. Retelling is a diagnostic technique teachers use to monitor whether students are aware of text structures and if they are using this knowledge before, during, and after they read. After reading a variety of texts, students begin to notice different ways information is presented and different patterns authors use when they write. They also recognize that the authors use different patterns to organize information. In every narrative text, there are characters, problems, a potential solution, and a final resolution. Effective readers are aware of the text structures authors use and apply this knowledge to predict what the author will write. They can also use their knowledge of the text structure of narrative to help them remember important details and to make sense of the story as they read.

Keywords: *retelling, narrative texts, strategy, reading comprehension*

A. INTRODUCTION

Many experts in teaching reading comprehension have tried give some definitions. Sweet & Snow (2003), for example, defines reading comprehension is the process of extracting and constructing meaning from text. There are three interactive elements which impact comprehension: the reader, the text, and the context. The reader is doing the comprehension. The reader's capabilities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences impact the act of reading. The text is anything that is read. The context is the activities of which comprehension is a part. There are three dimensions to these activities: purpose (why is the reader reading the text); processes (what mental activity must the reader engage in); and consequences (what did the reader learn or experience as a result of reading the text).

In other point of view, Dymock (2007) says that reading comprehension is also an interactive process between the reader and the text. Good reader uses a number of strategies, including activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension, generating ques-

tions, answering questions, drawing inferences, creating mental imagery, identifying the text structure the writer has used, and creating summaries. The reader interacts with the text and relates ideas from the text to prior experiences to construct meaning. A part of this process requires that the reader understands how the author has organized his ideas; text structure. There are two major types of text – narrative and expository. The structural pattern, or the way information is organized, and the relationships those ideas form to communicate meaning are different. Narrative text typically follows a single general structural pattern often called story grammar. Expository text comes in a variety of patterns; for example, description, sequence, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem solution. These two types are organized differently so that the reader must use their comprehension process differently when reading the texts.

Research has shown that teaching students strategies for focusing on text structure enhances their comprehension. Hence,

students need to be taught how to read different types of the text. They need to learn different strategies for different text (Amer, 1992). Moreover, students who are taught to identify the structure of expository and narrative text have been found to have better comprehension than students who have not received such instruction. (Taylor, 1992)

B. TEACHING NARRATIVE TEXT

According to Rebecca (2003), a narrative text is a text, which relates a series of logically, and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by factors. She, furthermore, states that a key to comprehending a narrative is a sense of plot, of theme, of characters, and of events, and of how they relate. In addition, she explains that a narrative is a text that tells a story and, in doing so, entertains the audience. It has character, setting, and action. The characters, the setting, and the problem of the narrative are usually introduced in the beginning. The problem reaches its high point in the middle. The ending resolves the problem. In addition, Anderson and Anderson (2003) explain that narrative is a text that tells a story and, in doing so, entertains the audience. It has character, setting, and action. The characters, the setting, and the problem of the narrative are usually introduced in the beginning. The problem reaches its high point in the middle. The ending resolves the problem.

The text structure of narrative text has been discussed by Anderson and Anderson (2003). They explain five steps in constructing a narrative text. They are orientation, complication, sequence of events, resolution, and coda. In orientation, the narrator tells the audience who is in the story, when it is happening, where it is happening, and what is happening. In complication, the narrator tells about something that will begin a chain of events. These events will affect one or more of the characters. The complication is the trigger. Then, in the next step, sequence of events, the narrator tells how the characters react to the complication. In this step, the feelings of the character and what

they do are included. In addition, the events can be told in chronological order (the order in which they happen) or with flashbacks. The audience is given the narrator's point of view. In resolution part, complication is sorted out or the problem is solved. Coda is an optional structure in a narrative. In this part, the narrator includes a coda if there is to be a moral or message to be learned from the story.

For a variety of reasons, learners may struggle to read narrative text. Narrative text encompasses a wide breadth of genres, in both fiction and nonfiction domains. As students progress through grade levels, the narrative text they are exposed to becomes increasingly complex (Dymock, 2007). Additionally, a lack of knowledge about narrative-text structure, a skill generally acquired before or during early elementary education, can broadly interfere with student comprehension.

How does instruction in text structure help students to comprehend written text, and what strategies are effective for understanding narrative text? Some experts in teaching reading have clarified how to introduce the text structure and effective strategies to teach narrative text. Fitzgerald & Spiegel (1983) stated a key to comprehending narrative is a sense of plot, theme, characters, and events, and how they relate. Teaching students to attend to the organization of a well-formed story... improves not only comprehension but also the quality and creativity of stories the students compose.

Children learn the structure of narrative text by being read to (Caldwell & Lesly 2009). A study results showed that students who were read to, when asked to retell, were able to recall the main elements of a story including characters, problem, some events, and some sort of solution. The results also showed that students who have not been exposed to stories may need more explicit instruction when learning about the elements of a story. He added that teaching a narrative effectively requires thorough lecture instruction as well as reading comprehension strategies that allow students to fully

engage with the narrative text. Students must be encouraged to dynamically work with the text to develop proficient and creative interpretation strategies. Furthermore, such techniques allow students to understand and appreciate the assigned narrative on a personal level, making reading a more rewarding and enjoyable experience.

Lewis (2009) also suggested five points to be considered in teaching narrative text structure:

1. Have students identify key aspects of setting.
 - Encourage students to find words and phrases that signal the time and place a story occurs.
 - Read the beginnings of stories aloud noting the clues for time and place but also point out where authors may deliberately obscure the story's setting.
2. Have students identify characters.
 - Stop and list main and minor characters, noting physical and personality traits.
 - Help students to understand how authors reveal personality traits through character thoughts, behavior or language.
 - Encourage students to identify the main characters' goals and how these goals guide the story.
3. Help students to identify the obstacles in the way of character goals.
 - List obstacles, and guide students in conversations about the possible ways of overcoming obstacles. This allows for better understanding of a story and for the literature to become a "moral laboratory" for students to experiment with their own decision making.
4. Give students an understanding of plot.
 - Make sure to encourage students to look for the information included in the introduction or exposition of a story: Time, place, circumstances, main characters.

- Encourage them to look for the series of incidents where main characters go about achieving goals.
- Call attention to how the goals are achieved or not achieved in the conclusion, and the high point of the action.
- For students who have trouble, encourage them to make time lines of the narrative structure.

5. Make sure to monitor comprehension by pausing and asking key questions to help students

Reflects all parts of story grammar.

In conclusion, in teaching reading narrative text, teacher has to consider many things and students should be taught :

- That the setting establishes where and when the story takes place.
- That characters can be classified as major and minor.
- How to analyze individual characters, focusing on their appearance and personality, and how to compare and contrast characters.
- How to analyze the overall plot and that it consists of four parts: **Problem**. What is the problem in the story? **Response**. How do characters respond to the problem? **Action**. What do characters do about the problem? **Outcome**. What is the outcome?
- How to analyze individual episodes (i.e., subplot).
- That the theme is the message that underlies the story. The theme often explains the motives of the characters or comments on social relationships or society in general. The theme is often left to the reader to interpret. Ask your pupils, "Why did the author write the story?"

C. RETELLING STRATEGY

A number of experts has clarified the definition of retelling. Kalmbach (1986) in Stoicovy (2004) states that retelling is a

process of memorizing what we listened to and read. Morrow (1989) defines retelling as "post reading or post listening recalls in which readers or listeners tell what they remember either orally or in writing". Reem (2013) states that retelling is redoing or reconstructing something. This leads us to say that it is a sophisticated activity that requires the reteller to collect items, organize, find the relation among them in order to reconstruct and introduce them in a new form that keeps up the meaning and the theme. In other words, it is expressing an experience that the reteller has passed in a personal form and his/her own understanding and opinion to the core matter.

According to Koskinen (1988) retelling requires the reader to organize text information in order to provide a personal rendition of it. It has been found to significantly improve story comprehension, sense of story structure, and oral complexity. As a comprehension strategy, retelling:

1. encourages reader to attend the meaning of the text.
2. reinforces elements of story structure such as, characters, setting, and plot.
3. requires readers to distinguish between key ideas and supporting details.
4. encourages communication and oral language development.

In teaching narrative text, there are many purposes of implementing of retelling strategies. It helps students remember a story. A student should recall, in his or her own words, details about character, setting, plot, conflict, and information. It encourages students to reread passages and discover new things. It is a form of paraphrasing. It helps students synthesize information as they put it in their own words.

Stoicovy (2004) also points out that based on several studies, retelling has positive influence in language learning as it promotes students' ability in rearranging information from the text that they have read. In addition, Brown & Cambourne (1987) mention that during the retelling

process students apply and develop their language knowledge through the internalization of the texts' features.

As a teacher, retelling helps her identify the level of students' comprehension of what they listen to or read. It helps teachers to attend to the level of retention and understanding achieved by the student. It reveals students' ability to recognize the structure of the text and setting items in a logical order. It also reveals the level of linguistic advantages the students have achieved.

Johnson (1983) for example, stated that retelling is the most directly accessing in teaching and the reaction result of the reader from the text. Retelling signifies the reader or the listener understanding of learning's and creates new construction of character and reflects in retelling apprehension. Retelling helps readers or listeners to respond to the structure of stories regarding the personal explication of each message. It is the process of involving children in creating text and also allows interoperability between adults and young learners. Retelling motivates learners about the text for both integration and personalization that also helps learners view what the content components of the message and how the text related to their experiences. Also, Koskinen et al. (1988) explicated that retelling is a useful teaching technique to encourage students in communication, and improves an oral language comprehension. It provides the readers to separate between the point of ideas and supporting details and retelling helps students to understand the text's meaning. It advocates students to learn about the story's elements such as plot, setting, and characters. Readers or listeners retell the story from their remembering through speaking, drawing, or writing; and retelling can help students rethink to the ways of enhancing in retelling the story comprehension (Owocki, 1999).

In short, retelling is a reading comprehension strategy that engages pupils at different levels of language: from interpreting meaning at the whole text level, to individual words and phrases and back to the whole

text again. It provides opportunities for pupils to engage in a whole range of important language and cognitive processes including recall of events/information, main points and characters, text structures and language features. It also provides opportunities for all of the major language skills to be applied - listening, reading and viewing as well as speaking, presenting and writing - as pupils actively make meaning of texts and share their understanding with their peers.

The following is a model of retelling technique for teaching narrative text, suggested by Hilderbrant & Condy (2008)

The procedures are:

1. Write the name of the story (Three Friends of a Kind) on the chart paper, overhead, or chalkboard.

Model Think aloud (e.g.): When I see this title it makes me think this will be a story. The title reminds me of a lot of folktales I know. I wonder if this will be a folktale. I wonder if this will be about three friends that are people or three friends that are animals. I wonder what the title means by three friends “of a kind?” I wonder if these friends will be kind to each other, or does the author mean they are alike in some way like three-of-a-kind?

2. Then distribute copies of the text so that each participant has an individual copy. Tell them to follow along as you read aloud. Remind them not to read ahead.

3. Teacher reads the text loud.

Three Friends of a Kind

By Abenaa Korama

Long ago, Fox, Monkey, and Rabbit were great friends. (*Think Aloud: Ahha! I was right. This is a story, and it is about animal friends so I believe it will be some kind of folktale, because in real life a fox, monkey, and rabbit are not really friends.*)

They lived in the forest. Each of these animals was a clever trickster in his own way, but Rabbit was the most cunning of them all. Each time any of them played a trick on

his friend, that friend was able to use his wits to free himself from danger.

(*Think Aloud: I think the word “cunning” means “smart” because the author uses the word “clever” and “wits” to tell about these characters.*)

[Explain that you will create a chart to keep track of the story. On the chart paper write the label Characters

Retelling: This is a story about three Characters, and then list: Fox, Monkey, and Rabbit.

Retelling: Write the label Setting, and then retell: This story takes place long ago, in the forest.]

Explain that the author has already identified the characters and where the story takes place.

(Think Aloud, I predict these friends are going to have a problem and they are going to have to be cunning to solve the problem. I wonder what the problem might be?)

[On the chart paper, add the label: Problem. Think aloud: I predict the problem will be one character is going to be jealous of another character.]

continue reading.....

There came a time when there was famine in the land in which they lived. Food was very difficult to come by. Most of the animals including the three friends suffered greatly. The animals had to walk long distances in search of food. Sometimes they returned home with very little food for themselves and their families. At other times, they returned home empty handed. It was really a hard time.

(*Retell: The problem is there is no food. List on chart paper under Problem: no food to eat. I wonder how the friends will try to solve the problem. I predict they will leave home and go to a place where there is more food.*)

One day, the Squirrel wondered, “For how long is this famine going to last?”

The Rat added, “Nobody knows how long the famine will last. If we don’t do something about it, we are all going to die soon.” (Think Aloud: These marks “ “ mean that someone is talking. They show the part that tells what the characters said.)

Continue reading....

The animals met on several occasions to think about what to do to get food to eat, but they could not find a solution. Tiger was the only animal who did not suffer. This is because he was very rich. While the other animals played, he farmed. He had many farms and enough food to eat. He was also very selfish and wicked. He cared little about how the other animals could get food to eat. Some of the animals were very poor and had no money to buy food. Tiger was also a money lender. (Think aloud: This whole paragraph seems to be about Tiger. I think he must be an important character in this story. I’ll have to add him to my list of characters. I wonder whether he will be a good character or a bad character. Tigers are usually not very friendly.) He lent money to the animals that needed it and woe to any animal that borrowed money from Tiger and did not pay back at the given time. Tiger either ate him up or held him hostage and made such animals work for him on his farms. For this reason, all the animals feared him. Even Lion, who claimed to be very strong, feared Tiger.

[On chart, add Tiger to the list of characters. Retell: The tiger is another character, maybe an evil character.]

Continue reading.....

One day, Fox, Monkey, and Rabbit met to discuss their plight (Think aloud: This is a strange word. I’m not exactly sure what it means but it looks like it could rhyme with “light” so at least I know how to pronounce it.)

Fox suggested, “Friends, why don’t we make our own farm? That way we shall

soon have food to eat.” (Think aloud: I’ll have to add this to my list of story ideas. This part tells how the characters are going to try to solve the problem. Instead of going away, they will grow food.)

[On chart paper add a new label Solution: *then retell: The friends plan to solve the problem by making their own farms. List: make farms, grow food*] “That’s a very good idea,” replied Monkey. “But I think it would be better for us if each of us makes his own farm.” (Think aloud: I wonder why the Monkey would say this. I’m guessing he probably doesn’t trust that his friends will work as hard as he will or that they will argue over how to do things.)

Rabbit also added, “Well, well, making a farm is a very good thing, but we have no money to start now.”

[*Retell: The friends needed money to start their own farms. On the chart paper under the label Problem add No money*]

Then Monkey suggested, “Let’s go to Tiger to borrow money to make our farms. I’m sure he will grant us some loan.” (Think aloud: I have a feeling this is not going to go very well for somebody. I think either the Tiger won’t give them money or if he does they will have trouble paying back the loan.) “Very well, let’s go tomorrow” Fox added.

[*Retell: The friends will ask the Tiger to loan them money to make their farms. On the chart paper under the label Solution add: Borrow money from Tiger.*]

Continue reading....

The next day, the three friends set off to see Tiger. When they got to his house, he was asleep so they had to wait for some time until he woke up. To their surprise, Tiger was very pleasant towards them. He welcomed them warmly and asked, “Folks, what can I do for you?” (Think aloud: I like the way this storyteller has the animals talking. They seem a lot like people! I’m going to try to remember to have characters talk like this when I write a story.) They all

spoke and said, “We’ve come to borrow money to make our own farms.” “Very well, tell me how much each of you will need and I’ll give it to you,” said Tiger with a smile.

“We shall need five hundred thousand cedis each to start our farms,” they all said. Tiger entered his room and brought five hundred thousand cedis to each of them. Tiger was very friendly that day. (Think aloud: Maybe I was wrong about the Tiger. The author makes him sound very nice here.) He had a long chat with them about a lot of things. After a while, the three friends and Tiger agreed on the time for paying back the loan, and they left. On their way home, they started to make plans for their farms.

[Retell: Tiger loaned each friend some money to make a farm. Add this to Solutions. Tiger loans money.]

Fox said, “I want to make a big cocoa farm. With that, I’ll get plenty of money. As you know, cocoa is a very important crop.” Monkey said, “I prefer a big banana farm to a cocoa farm. It doesn’t take too long for banana trees to bear fruits. You know I like bananas very much. I’ll have as many bananas as I like and sell some to the other animals who like bananas.”

Rabbit also said, “I want to make a big farm of food crops and vegetables. Soon, I’ll get food crops like corn, yam, cocoyam, plantain, and sweet potatoes. I’ll also have tomatoes, garden eggs, okra, pepper, green vegetables, and beans. I’ll have plenty to eat, give some to the poor and sell the rest to the animals who can afford to buy them. I can also keep some against a rainy day.”

(Retell: Each Friend decides to make a different kind of farm List under Solutions: Fox/Cocoa; Monkey/Banana; Rabbit/Food Crops)

Think aloud: Now I see why the animals wanted their own farms. They have very different ideas. I wonder if they will all be able to pay back their loans and still have enough food to eat.)

(the story continues....)

(Three Friends of a Kind, by Abenaa Korama, Published by Royal Gold Publishers Limited, Accra, Ghana 1999).

Review the story information listed in the story map to this point. Explain that the story continues but it is not included in this material. Have the participants work in groups to brainstorm how the story might end. Have them write an ending to the story. Remind them they might wish to add new characters, settings, problems, and solutions as they complete the story. Allow about 20 minutes for groups to brainstorm and complete writing. When all groups have finished writing, call on volunteers to read aloud their story conclusion. Encourage groups to read in pairs or dramatize as a Readers Theater or ask the students to retell the story in front of the class individually.

D. CONCLUSION

Retelling strategy provides an opportunity for readers to process what they have read by organizing and explaining it to others. Retelling develops students’ story grammar because they must identify crucial points and the support information especially in narrative text. It also reinforces sequencing since it demands remembering information, events, and processes. It encourages interacting with the text from a variety of perspectives: their own, their audience’s, and the author’s. Retelling supports good reading because students must engage in repeated readings of the text, which supports fluency.

Retellings require the reader or listener to integrate and reconstruct the parts of a story. They reveal not only what readers or listeners remember, but also what they understand. Retellings build story comprehension.

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Appendix: The example of teaching materials

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(Think Aloud, I predict these friends are going to have a problem and they are going to have to be cunning to solve the problem. I wonder what the problem might be?)

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