Dr. Michal Schanin & Vera Yogev

Between the Lines

Developing Strategic Reading Skills
Instruction | Learning | Alternative Assessment

Workbook 2

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Table of Contents

Introduction

When one delves into the professional literature about reading, one might come across many publications on this subject. However these articles might not offer a satisfying explanation about the process of acquiring reading.

In the past, a common and prevailing belief maintained that if students were to be confronted with questions about the content of the text, eventually they would understand its meaning independently. Yet today it is widely accepted that the extent and depth of reading processes are not as simple as that.

The process of extracting meaning out of texts encompasses various aspects. Take, for example, producing meaning out of the text and augmenting, assessing and creating new meanings out of this text. It turns out that acquiring the meaning of a text is not restricted only to processing information, finding answers and the automatic output of deciphering text. In contrast, acquiring the meaning of a text is a complex multi-dimensional process.

Every reader can achieve and develop a process of producing meaning from the text, and in this way exercise beneficial skills and strategies that help understand the meaning. Therefore, teachers should instruct their students in ways to pair skills and strategies to various reading situations while relying on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic clues in order to extract meaning from a text.

The development of reading and the production of meaning from a text happen simultaneously to many other interrelated skills. Readers often find that their involvement in the reading process and in the grapho-phonemic deciphering process assists their capability to understand the context. These skills guide children through the deciphering process. Simultaneously, it provides them with feedback as to the extent of correctness achieved by their deciphering.

Reading is an interactive process that interrelates many and varied skills. To achieve skilled reading, one must develop reading skills and strategies that may avail him or her during reading. Integral integration of the whole pack of strategies—deciphering and understanding while applying meta-cognitive checking—can lead readers to skilled reading. These reading skills serve as a toolbox for the readers and help them with reading and

understanding texts. Skillful readers transform skills into an integral part of the process of reading. Thus for example, readers can understand the main idea of a text quickly and precisely, foretell coming events in the text, draw conclusions from a text and apply the meaning of the text to their own personal lives.

The skill of producing meaning from a text might become an automatic and unaware one, but using strategies is a result of a well-informed and intentional discretion: how to cope with reading tasks and which skills to use.

Pearson et al. (1990) emphasized in their research that not only the reader's skills but also the right timing is necessary. Both capabilities–the ability to plan reading and the right timing–create a productive result in achieving reading strategies and meta-cognitive control.

We have learned from our long-term work in the educational field that teachers need to put theoretical methods into practice. These skills and strategies are highly important in developing language education in the various populations of students.

We have chosen from the varied curriculum of language education a genre (system) that can demonstrate to teachers and students some core strategies. After becoming familiar with them, they can put them into practice.

Basic Hypotheses

* Language education takes on language both as a means and an end in developing students' language efficiency in oral and written language.

* Preschool children start their schooling geared with a wide and varied linguistic knowledge (mainly their proficiency of oral language) but also of written language. This knowledge is expressed through understanding and production of clauses and phrases and through the unique meanings a child may attach to them.

* One can detect a variance in the level of language acquisition among peers. This variance is manifested through the pace of acquiring reading, vocabulary, discourse styles, cognitive development and more.

* Written language can be challenging for the acquiring student; direction and explicit learning in class is needed to help students with this.

* The notion *language* refers to various communication channels and to different discourse styles as well as to varied levels of language and genres.

* The genre that was selected for this book specifically refers to folktales, fables and folklore.

* Knowledge of language may include both grammatical and practical proficiency and the know-how of using language in different contexts.

* The knowledge of language is acquired through textual contexts.

* By initially practicing patterns that consist of simple phrases in order to gradually acquire a language, the learner progresses to building up more complex sentences that he or she can grasp with the mind.

Aims of Language Education

A meta-aim of language education is to foster a literate person for whom language can meet with the reader's communicative needs:

* Producing meaning from written texts and maintaining a well-informed use of the unique genre we chose for this book.

* Providing tools and skills that deliver knowledge about language and learning strategies that will be acquired by using this specific genre and applying these tools, skills and strategies to other genres.

* Developing an informed reading ability of literary texts and Jewish folktales and maintaining a dialogue with Jewish sources.

* Developing students' capability of written expression, which allows them to express their inner and outer worlds.

* Learning the various usages of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These usages interrelate with skills that are involved with understanding and expressing language.

* Developing activities that foster meta-linguistic knowledge about language (learning journal, indicators).

* Developing the ability to pass on knowledge through speech, writing and reading exercises.

* Handling texts while manipulating a structured learning of linguistic patterns (language patterns) in order to gear learners with various tools that allow self-expression, reading comprehension and critical, analytical and evaluation reading

The Goals of Language Education

* Development of skills and strategies that structure the meaning of the text while providing a toolbox that can help students through the reading process.

* Development of thinking skills in students through reading that spans from a verbal production of meaning to providing an applied meaning of a text.

* Development of language enrichment for students by gradually providing them with linguistic tools that can present them with the basics of meaningful reading.

* Development of retrieving and matching capabilities in students that enable them to match various strategies and skills to varied types of texts.

* Development of capabilities in students to transform various strategies and apply them correctly in all types of texts in Hebrew learning environments such as history, Bible, geography, etc.

* Development of appreciation and control processes in students, which are based on indicators. These indicators are a part of the criteria that belong to each strategy.

* Development of reflection and feedback in students about all processes of learning, thinking, and reading while using a learning journal that documents their reading.

* Enhancing teachers' capabilities of mediating between text and reader. At the same time, adjusting skills and reading strategies that facilitate a meaningful understanding of the text.

* Enhancing the teacher's skill of establishing various independent tasks at different thought levels, following the example molded by this workbook.

Enhancing the teacher's awareness of the passages, scaling up from literate to interpretive understanding. Directing a teacher's attention to differences that might exist among the students in the class. Principles of the Program

The program focuses on the control of managing literacy in discourse, which enables speakers to adjust their language to social circumstances and aims, to various knowledge areas and to their previous knowledge of a target population. The language education curriculum aims to cover various texts that belong to genres and sub-genres of varied fields of knowledge. Literacy functioning is the ability to understand different genres and use them in oral conversation. In this program we chose one genre in particular. We formulated six texts for each age group. Our program deals with the full literate discourse that is very characteristic of tales, fables and folktales. Being part of the curriculum, this choice intends to meet with two of our aims: first to practice language and then to help with the production of meaning from texts. Students love and are willing to use this genre, and they find it fun and motivating personally and culturally. Our second aim is to enable students to learn a lesson from this genre. The program enhances the student's listening and oral expression skills. We also made sure to integrate these skills in various activities. The skill of developing listening abilities is an outcome of a constant dialogue that exists between the spoken and written discourses.

During the program, students are asked to listen to the teacher or their peers who read to them in front of the whole class. The workbook assignments are latterly practiced in groups or individually and at the end of the activity each group or individual presents their thoughts to the whole class.

The feedback—a learning journal will document their learning, enabling the students to follow up on the meta-cognitive processes.

By using these meta-cognitive processes, students may acquire both linguistic knowledge and may understand various genres and subgenres of texts.

The World of Discourse—The Genre: Legends, Tales and Fables

Legends, tales and fables all belong to one genre that provides insights into past or present events together with an added value of their cultural and authentic facets. The strict and set structure of this genre is based on its background, its characters and its lessons to be

learned. In order to learn how to forge meaning out of these characteristics, learners are provided with strategies that reflect and focus on differences that exist in this genre and point to variances that can be found in the backgrounds, structures, messages, characters and their interactions with our tales.

The most prominent characteristic of this genre is its formal construction, which consists of introduction, setting, conflict, catharsis or peak, resolution, turning point and conclusion.

In order to understand the process in texts, an awareness must be raised in students to the sequence of the plot, its details and the characters. Students learn how to separate the wheat from the chaff, both orally and textually. To acquire these strategies students are dependent on their linguistic knowledge of verbs, adjectives, structural words and phrases, which altogether are very helpful in delivering the entire plot and subtexts.

Through reading the text, readers can establish their own personal interpretations and crystallize their attitudes to it; allowing them to make their own premises and draw conclusions that result in a critical reading of the text. All these traits are immensely helpful and ameliorate students' understanding of the text and help develop various skills.

In addition, readers format their own personal viewpoint of the text and can identify with the author's viewpoint.

Leading the learner to these outcomes should happen through practicing various and relevant learning strategies. At the same time learners must use appropriate language structures.

About the Program

Based on a cognitive approach, the underlying features of our program *Between the Lines* include using reading skills and strategies as well as harnessing the student's meta-cognitive system for directing and orienting reading (Pearson1990).

According to this approach there are seven principle characteristics that are shared by all skilled readers without regard to their level or age:

1. A reader can easily separate the wheat from the chaff.

2. Readers look for a link between material they know and newly read material.

3. A reader establishes a hypothetical model for the newly read themes; a model to be tested throughout reading.

4. The model established by the reader will be remodeled according to conclusions the reader draws from the meaning of the text.

5. A reader can summarize what she or he has just read.

6. A reader is efficient in drawing conclusions throughout and after the process of reading and can achieve full understanding of the text.

7. A reader can independently raise questions about the author, the text and themselves.

All these skills should be acquired by readers so they can potentially reach a better understanding of the text.

The *Between the Lines* program applies to three levels of thinking:

1. A literal understanding of the text.

2. An interpretative level of the text.

3. An implemental level of the text.

After being divided into sub-skills, these levels can be found helpful in creating intermediate stages in the process of reading and producing the text meaning. We developed our method through eclectic and integrative means and "implementation tools;" namely the above-mentioned skills and strategies that interweave through the three levels of understandings mentioned above. These implementation tools should meet with most of the needs of our student populations, including under-achieving populations and special-needs students. Our program has put an emphasis on linguistic enrichment and practice while paying attention to the deep structural layers of language and linguistic enrichment. This emphasis is manifested through the following implementation tools:

* Graded linguistic patterns.

* Implicit and explicit content clues.

* General and linguistic cloze excerpts.

The graded linguistic patterns are syntactical structures that provide the entire components of the English language.

Implicit and explicit content clues—provide accessories for the reader. Through locating these implicit and explicit content clues a student becomes an independent, skilled and efficient reader. The content clues allow him or her to unfold meaning and internal contexts of a sentence.

Cloze passages—texts that have blanks in them where some of the words in the texts are missing. By recovering the excerpt through embedding the omitted words, a student can test his or her proficiency by using the three above-mentioned levels of text understanding.

In order to be able to recover a deficient passage the student should command these skills: linguistic skills, the ability of contextual and textual repetition and pragmatic and cultural knowledge skills.

* Linguistic skills—includes vocabulary and syntax.

* Contextual ability—the links that tie together parts of a text.

* Pragmatic knowledge—former knowledge that can be applied.

* Cultural knowledge—a culture-dependent knowledge.

Our *Between the Lines* program integrates both tools of assessment and measuring that yield feedback and reflection to teachers about their methods of teaching, about their students' learning and student-teacher interrelated dialogue.

The two assessment tools that were selected for *Between the Lines* are:

1. Learning journal

2. Indicators

Both tools help to develop teacher-learner communication. They also contribute to formative assessment and summative assessment.

1. Learning Journal

A learning journal is one of the learning and assessment tools designed for acquiring knowledge through the raising of guided questions. It prompts the intrinsic self-searching of students and encourages them to look closely at their learning processes.

A learning journal can store all the linkages and products that were documented by learners throughout their learning processes. It offers an initial stock of learning processes.

By verbalizing their thinking processes, learners can raise awareness of their learning experiences. Journals can also provide them with fresh knowledge about their own learning and thinking strategies (Birnbaum, 1999). Learners can also retrospectively view their successes and challenges. Furthermore, verbalizing of thinking processes can help students enhance their potential for being "independent learners."

The components of our Learning Journal include:

∗   Addressing the gist of knowledge.

∗   Addressing and locating challenges.

∗   Finding a link between prior personal knowledge and current knowledge.

∗   Forming an opinion and taking a stand.

2. Indicators

An Indicator is based on yardsticks that familiarize students with what is expected of them throughout the upcoming assignments.

Each indicator manifests some dimensions, which are needed for giving indication about the quality of students' work. They can usually be further divided into three levels of student control and performance:

∗   At the beginning—students are without control.

∗   On their way to goal-achieving—are partly in control.

∗   Fully achieving their goal—are in full control.

The characteristics of these yardsticks apply to each of the above-mentioned levels of performance. By tracing these characteristics, teachers and students can diagnose the level of performance achieved and what should be improved and/or strengthened. In the same vein, these characteristics can point to weaknesses and strengths of the learning process.

The Indicator is a guiding light that students follow on their way to achieving their goals—control and strategy. These yardsticks present the students, in painstaking detail,

the expectations of their performance. Success measures can mirror students' abilities and direct them to achieving higher levels of success.

By being a teacher-student interactive tool, the Indicator helps teachers continue to be persistent and accurate in their evaluations. By enabling students to realize their own challenges and strengths, the Indicator also raises awareness of their teacher's expectations and evaluations.

Design of the Program

This program is comprised of three workbooks that were especially designed for enhancing reading and thinking and for acquiring text meaning by way of implementing tools for self-evaluation and measuring for learners and teachers.

Aimed at 2nd to 6th graders and their teachers, the program can be modularly implemented by the teacher by matching the level of workbook to his or her class level, in full accord with students' needs.

The program allows teachers to choose and delegate various assignments to different students. Its underlying objective is to develop appropriate reading and writing skills in students that are needed for a versed usage of the written language.

By not aiming at specific student knowledge that was learned in class and by not testing it, the program alternatively provides students with skills they need for functional literacy. It also supports them in learning which skills and thinking strategies are needed for each specific literacy activity.

Each workbook contains a repository of six literary texts that were extracted from a widely-accepted curriculum for elementary schools. In each text, the three levels of thinking (verbal understanding, interpretive understanding and the implemental level) are practiced. There are sub-skills in each level of thinking that are also practiced, and all in all they are aimed at developing a meta-cognitive thinking ability that provides guidance for using the right tools. Each workbook contains an introduction that was written for teachers and parents, illuminating the principles and goals of the program.

Verbal Understanding

The level of verbal understanding includes the following skills:

Sequence

The narrative sequence is practiced in the current workbook through using:

1. A sequence of segments.

2. A sequence of key sentences.

3. A sequence of keywords.

4. A sequence of questions.

Workbook 1 places a special emphasis on the issue of sequential abilities. Sequence in narratives is a topic that has been thoroughly investigated in literature. It was found that when students achieve an understanding of the narrative sequence of a text they can also grasp more than 50 percent of the text content without dwelling on minute narrative details.

B. The Skill of Finding Detail

The skill of finding detail is practiced in this workbook by raising questions such as:

1. Who said this to whom?

2. Find an alternative word.

3. True or False?

4. Classification tables.

A reader can piece together the details of the narrative sequence by using this skill.

C. Locating a Main Idea

Locating a main idea is practiced in this workbook by locating a key sentence of the text that holds a wealth of keywords. Linking keywords by conjunctions will lead readers to the sentence that presents the main idea of the text.

D. Raising and Classifying Questions

Being a meta-cognitive skill, this ability is practiced in the workbook by using interrogatives, namely WH-words, in readers' three levels of thinking:

Literal level of questions	Interpretive level of questions	Implemental questions
Who?	Why?	What did you feel…?
What?	How?	What do you think…?
How much?	Whether?	What would you do instead…?
Where to?	Which?	Was the author right when…?
Where?	How come?	Why do you think it happened….?
Where?	In which way?	What would you do if…?

The practice of raising questions in these three levels of thinking and at the same time compiling them and classifying them in tables, supports the development of thinking in students.

E. Mapping out of Concepts

To exercise this skill we developed three tools for knowledge management. The beneficial aspect of these tools is that they allow for plotting graphical maps out of linear text. Using keywords and conjunctions and embedding them in these maps helps the student sum up the text.

The three tools of knowledge management are:

1. Flow charts.

2. Venn Diagrams.

3. Diffuse Mapping.

1. Flow Charts

Flow charts are helpful in tracking plots and sequences of events or can be used in scientific texts that are based on cause and effect.

By plotting a chart, a learner defends his or her understanding of the text. By embedding keywords and key sentences in a chart a learner manifests his or her ability to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Flow charts can also be utilized for developing the skill of summarization. This skill consists of using keywords and key sentences and of integrating conjunctions to make a link between them.

2. Venn Diagrams

This tool can be used in cases when we want to demonstrate contrast and to compare things (intersection and union). Embedding keywords and key sentences in these diagrams trains learners to separate the wheat from the chaff.

For example:
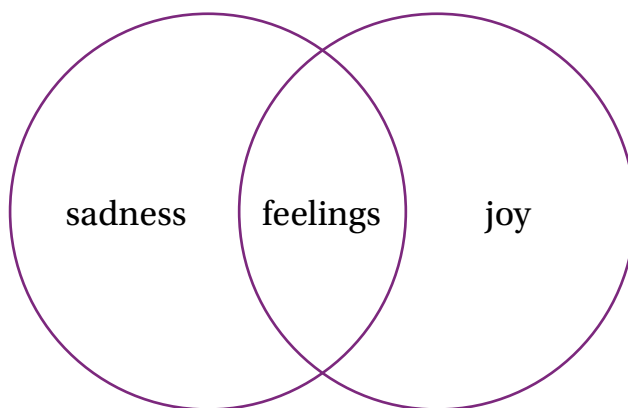
Through using Venn Diagrams, one can develop his or her summarization skills: joining together keywords and key sentences within the Venn diagram and then making a connection between them with a conjunction and creating a summarization out of them.

3. Concept Map

Using this mapping helps students to select factual information from informative texts, if the sequential order is irrelevant in these texts.

To organize this factual information a student can plot it in classification tablets that consist of columns of generalizing semantic categories. In this way items are grouped together under the same category. This tool for organizing information is selected according to the text genre.

F. Classification

This ability is practiced through using classification tables in the current workbook. Classification tables are information organizers. They are built by manipulating either inductive or deductive reasoning. In more simple words, the method of reasoning can derive general principles from particular facts or derive the reasoning by going from the general to the specific facts.

G. Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

To encourage students to practice this skill the workbook offers three principle tools:

1. Naming the sequence of segments.

2. Locating key sentences.

3. Locating keywords.

1. Naming the Sequence of Segments

The skill of naming the sequence of segments entails one to locate the meaningful segments of the narrative, to identify bridging passages between segments and to give titles for each segment separately. The resulting sequence of titles will yield a synopsis of the narrative.

2. Locating Key Sentences

The text key sentences are those that are most significant in each segment; sentences that without them a segment would be meaningless.

There are two main questions for locating and identifying key sentences in each segment.

a. Who is the segment talking about?

b. What is the segment talking about?

The answers to these questions might be either one or several key sentences of a text.