

LINKING READING AND WRITING FOR SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE LEARNING



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There is a broad consensus in the relationship between reading and writing. Most experts agree that, although not identical, reading and writing are similar and mutually supportive language processes (Butler and Turbil, 1984). Both rely on the reader's or writer's background knowledge to construct meaning and both make use of cueing systems (graphic, semantic, syntactic) to allow the reader or writer to predict and confirm meaning. Traditionally reading and writing have been viewed as two separate processes with little in common, however much of the research is guided by the theory that both reading and writing involve meaning making (Shanahan, 1997).

The fact that both reading and writing processes share similar cognitive stages, specifically planning, drafting, aligning, and revising has pedagogical implications for classroom teachers who can take advantage of these similarities and integrate them thus enriching not only both linguistic skills but language learning in general.

THEORY

A theoretical approach to the interrelationship of reading and writing processes suggest that both processes are constructive and developmental processes; both require learners to use prior knowledge and interpretative skills to grasp the author's meaning,

utilize self-directed feedback, and employ the reciprocal transitive process. According to Wittrock (1984), "readers and writers develop meaning by constructing relationships between the text and what they know, believe, and experience" (p. 77). When writers compose, they use text to convey information. Writers produce texts with structure; readers use structure when they construct meaning.

When readers and writers practice reading and writing within academic contexts, for example, they recognize the need to make and create meaning by developing their own understanding of texts. They participate as engaged readers and writers within the academic community. They interact with peers and instructors making and creating meaning which involves a reciprocal transaction between the reader and the writer. This transaction involves an awareness of the writer's meaning, purpose and understanding (Nystrand, 1986 as cited by Valerie-Gold and Deming, 2000).

An important point in the theory about reading and writing is that both share similar linguistic and cognitive elements: As readers read and writers compose, both plan, draft, align, revise and monitor as they read and write. Or they select, organize and connect. (Tierney and Pearson, 1983, Spivey and King, 1989, as cited by Valerie-Gold and Deming, 2000).

Planning, involves two processes: setting goals and using prior knowledge based on their background of personal experience.

Drafting, both readers and writers need to create a first draft. Readers look for clues to help them discover the upcoming meaning of the text. From these clues, they hypothesized what is to follow.

In aligning, readers select their viewpoint. Alignment requires that readers and writers reread, rethink, reexamine, and review the author's stance in order to interpret the text.

During monitoring, readers and writers evaluate what they read or write while composing meaning. This is a composing model of reading and writing.

Both readers and writers are involved in many of the same activities that writers use. They generate ideas, organize, monitor, problem-solve, and revise. Furthermore the reading and writing processes have comparable activities at each step. Five steps have been identified in the process to read and write. The next chart adapted from Tompkins (2000) show clearly the relationship between the reading and writing processes.

The reading process

1. **Pre-reading**. Students activate prior knowledge and make predictions about the text they will read.

2. Reading. Students read the text or listen to the teacher read the text aloud. Students use a variety of reading strategies and skills as they decode words and create meaning.

3. Responding. Students respond by writing in reading logs, participating in grand conversations, and dramatizing events from the text.

4. Exploring. Students examine vocabulary, participate in minilessons on skills and strategies, and learn about authors and literacy genres. They also reread the text and examine the literacy language.

5. Applying. Students extend their reading by doing projects related to the text. Their projects involve reading, writing, listening, talking, the arts, and research.

The writing process

1. **1. Prewriting.** Students gather and organize ideas for writing. Young children use drawings for prewriting, and older children often use clusters.

2. **2. Drafting.** Students pour out their ideas, focusing on content, not mechanics.

3. **3. Revising.** Students reread what they have written, participate in writing groups, and make revisions based on the feedback they have received.

4. **4. Editing.** Students proofread their writing to identify and then correct errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

5. **5. Publishing.** Students put their writing in final form

In his influential study about the relationship between reading and writing, Stostsky (1983) concluded that (1) good writers tend to be better readers than are less able writers, (2) good writers tend to read more frequently and widely and to produce more syntactically complex writing, (3) writing itself does not tend to influence reading comprehension, but when writing is taught for the purpose of enhancing

reading, there are significant gains in comprehension and retention of information, and (4) reading experiences have as great an effect on writing as direct instruction in grammar and mechanics.

RESEARCH

Research studies show that students learn to read and write better when the two processes are connected. Abu Rass (2001) reported about two projects, one conducted at a university in Arizona that examined the usefulness of integrating language and content and exposing the students to a massive amount of reading. The results showed superior gains in language proficiency and the students were also eager to read the assigned novels and enjoyed reading even though they encountered many unfamiliar words. The second project reported results of a study conducted in Israel where students designed an integrated reading and writing course for first year Arab EFL students at Beit Berl College, a four-year teacher training college. The results showed that the course improved all language skills because they had the chance to speak, listen, read and write. When they compared their written assignments they reported that could see their progress in terms of content, organization and mechanics.

Hamer (1997) compared the performance of 29 developmental learners enrolled in a community college who completed reading-related writing exercises to those who did not. Both groups read and wrote about their assigned readings (reading-writing focused) and those who read (reading-focused) to meet the course requirements. Results of the study indicated that "reading-writing focused students wrote more extensively in response to what was read, while the primarily reading students wrote to respond to questions requiring generally brief answers." (p.259).

Experimental studies have been conducted to demonstrate

how specific reading and writing techniques and strategies can enhance comprehension and retention of information in content area classes. They include summary writing, outlining and note taking. Results from these studies suggest that providing students with opportunities to write summaries improves comprehension and recall (Hill, 1991; Garner, 1985).

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on the interrelatedness of comprehension processes and composing processes Shanahan (1988) identified seven instructional principles for relating reading and writing:

1. Teachers provide daily opportunities for students to read literature and write in response to their reading.

2. Teachers introduce reading and writing in kindergarten and provide opportunities for young children to read and write for genuine purposes.

3. Teachers understand that students' reading and writing reflect the developmental nature of the reading-writing relationship.

4. Teachers make the reading-writing connection explicit to students by providing opportunities for them to share their writing with classmates, publish their own books, and learn about authors.

5. Teachers emphasize that the quality of students' reading and writing experiences depends on the processes they have used. For example, as students reread and talk about literature they deepen their comprehension, and as they revise their writing they communicate more effectively.

6. Teachers emphasize the communicative functions of reading and writing and involve students in reading and writing for genuine communication purposes.

7. Teachers teach reading and writing in meaningful contexts with literature.

These principles are incorporated into a balanced literacy program in which students read and write books and learn to view themselves as readers and writers.

Teaching strategies

The following teaching practices are based on the interactive nature of reading and writing, thus promoting students' comprehension.

Reading as preparation for writing:

Students read and engage as writers when they notice spelling of words and patterns of language; they reread passages because something was especially interesting or well said, they notice the rhymes, rhythms, vocabulary, and syntax of language. The relationship between reading and writing is widely accepted and the teacher should take advantage of that in order to improve both skills.

Using reading writing and discussion:

Teachers can promote students' reading and writing of narratives by having pre-reading conferences. First, introduce vocabulary and story elements such as the basic storyline. Teachers can make certain that students have an adequate store of appropriate prior knowledge, helping them bring what they already know to the materials and thus ensuring comprehension. Story components such as plot, setting, conflict, and resolution can be discussed individually or in small groups and then shared by all.

Other genres can also stimulate conversation, like newspaper or magazine articles where current news or daily affairs are read and then discussed in class.

Using multiple texts:

Using multiple texts also known as intertextuality is defined as a way to incorporate learner's knowledge

acquisition. Pre-established knowledge of texts keeps reorganizing itself by connecting relevant events. This connection between texts is spatial-temporal and provides a tool for readers to move back and forth between the text and its social background. According to Chiu Hsin-Yuen (2000) intertextuality enhances reading comprehension in a second language. Intertextuality is a cognitive process, that links past literary experiences and new texts as native readers do providing "more meaningful transactions with texts (Chi, 1995, as cited by Chiu, 2000). An example to create intertextuality is choosing two novels that contain a similar theme, like death and then from the two texts some patterns can emerge like storying, and integrating. The reading of two texts helps establishing relationships with one or two cultures. By reading two texts students unconsciously compare two cultures by applying knowledge of one culture to reading in another culture. Evaluating, asks readers to address their own judgements, values, conclusions, or generalizations (Chi, 1995). Once readers develop the ability to evaluate, they start to discover their own voices, values, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes, to be critical readers. Intertextuality is regarded as having great power in mental connections applied by readers. Associating is another pattern in which readers connect a variety of texts by titles, author's name or character's name. When asked to make associations cross texts, L2 readers typically recall L2 texts, movies, and songs with similar themes or scenarios. These recollections help them understand the current text better. These four patterns from L2 readers themselves are considered proper strategies to foster their intertextuality links.

Writing as preparation to reading:

Teachers use quick-writes in classroom for a variety of purposes: as brainstorming process before reading or writing, to synthesize

ideas during and after reading. Writing is thinking, then writing about a subject, students organize ideas, and clarify certain points, just as they find questions arising when they try to articulate ideas and perspectives. When students share their writing, teachers are able to see the understandings that their students are developing as well as identify misconceptions. Writing before reading also helps students access ideas that will facilitate their understanding of narratives. Students can keep writings in journals for later review and discussion as their insights grow and develop throughout their reading.

Webbing, concept mapping and semantic mapping:

Related to the background knowledge that individuals bring to either writing or a reading, the task exerts powerful influence on their ability to comprehend and to communicate effectively in print. Webbing provides a structure through which students can access and organize information and ideas and can actively connect the known to the new. Research and theory have supported webbing as a vehicle for enhancing comprehension and learning (Bromley, 1991).

Summarizing:

Research has shown that summarizing enhances reading comprehension. Anis (1985) described three requirements associated with the summarizing process: 1) focused attention on the task, (2) explicit connection of a reader's prior knowledge to material in the text, and 3) the transfer of central ideas in a text into the reader's own words.

Hill (1991) makes the point that students do not know intuitively how to write effective summaries. The task is especially complex for second language learners because they must negotiate both unfamiliar syntax and unfamiliar vocabulary to achieve comprehension and

construct a summary. Hill suggested that teachers direct students to begin with the simplest type of summary: a chronology of events associated with narratives. This is, in essence, a retelling dictated by the simple progression of events in a story; it represents a simpler task than writing a summary of a variety of expository text patterns. Moving beyond chronology, students can learn to create concept webs, as the next step. With the web, students learn to differentiate between main and supporting points; the webs can then be used as organizers for summaries. Students learn to condense by choosing the main points and reorganizing them into summaries for a variety of text structures, such as comparison-contrast, problem-solution, cause-effect, and so forth.

Teachers can model the summarizing process using a variety of materials. For example, as a class reads about and discusses current events reported in the newspaper, the teacher can model his or her thinking in choosing the main ideas from news stories, or editorials; then the teacher can write these ideas on the board and can think aloud while organizing them into a short summary and guiding discussion concerning the final product. As an alternative or subsequent activity, the teacher can write a summary while the students, alone, or in small groups, write a summary of their own. Teacher and students can then compare these summaries, discussing and evaluating effective versus less effective products. Through modeling by the teacher, practice and discussion, students can refine their summary-writing skills and thereby deepen their reading comprehension.

Providing students with opportunities to write summaries improves comprehension and recall. Taylor (1978) noted that summary writing improved when college-level students practiced paraphrasing and writing summaries for a passage during a 3 week training program.

The morning message:

This activity gives a fresh slant to typical beginning-of the day-classroom business and is "deliberately structured to demonstrate the importance of reading and writing in the classroom. The message could be something funny or something to learn. The questions that follow are. Who knows what this word is? What words are alike? What part of the message tells us today's date? As the school year progresses, the message gets more complex and they grow into multiple sentences. The teacher and the students work together to use phonic, syntactic, and semantic cueing systems to develop the messages' meaning. The teacher begins asking students what they notice about each written message. The message is authentic; therefore it is meaningful and highlights the importance of literacy.

Dialogue journal:

Dialogue journals are structured to interact with reading and writing, giving them the opportunity to develop a sense of ownership of writing that is highly functional and communicative (Urzua, 1987). They are written conversations between partners, usually a student and teacher. Each student regardless of his or her level of English proficiency writes an entry daily or weekly to which the teacher responds. The sentences can be short and each entry could be only one or two sentences long at first. The teacher's role is to support students' reading and writing development and respond as a conversationalist who might, react with personal comments, anecdotes, and questions. This should be a transaction between reader, writer and text, to use Rosenblatt's (1985) terminology. The intent is to involve students in reading and writing processes that are communicative and thus motivational in nature; students choose their own topics, write their entries, and eagerly read the teacher's response.

Dialogue journals have been

found to be highly effective with second language students, as well as native speakers at various stages of literacy development. Studies that have examined the use of dialogue journals report substantial improvement in students' writing, fluency, elaboration of topics, and use of conventional syntax (Staton, et al., 1988). Through such writer-reader transactions, students learn that reading and writing are purposeful and interconnected activities.

A FINAL NOTE

Teachers must feel empowered to teach all children effectively. When classroom practices are based on sound theory and research, there is greater chance that they will be effective language learners. When students are actively engaged in authentic, purposeful activities that capture their interest, promote interaction, and facilitate communication, teachers can be assured that the students are well on the road to success in reading and writing and through them in successful language learning.

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