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DEVELOPING THE COGNITIVE SKILLS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH THE COMPREHENSION OF LITERARY TEXTS: A TECHNOLOGY FOR THE READING CLASSROOM

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Abstract: This article examines an instructional technology designed to cultivate the cognitive abilities of young learners while they read and interpret works of imaginative literature. Reading at the primary level is treated not merely as the decoding of printed symbols but as an active intellectual undertaking in which a child observes, compares, infers, and evaluates. The study describes a staged procedure that links each phase of textual engagement with a specific mental operation, so that attention, memory, analytical thinking, and imaginative reconstruction are trained in a deliberate sequence rather than left to chance. Drawing on classroom observation within the subject of Reading, the author argues that purposeful questioning, visualization tasks, and reflective discussion transform passive listeners into thoughtful interpreters. The findings suggest that when comprehension instruction is organized around cognitive goals, pupils demonstrate noticeably stronger inferential reasoning and more independent judgment about what they have read.

Keywords: reading comprehension, cognitive skills, primary education, literary texts, instructional technology, inferential reasoning.

1. Introduction

The early years of schooling determine, to a large extent, the intellectual trajectory a child will follow for the rest of his or her education. Among the competencies acquired during this formative stage, the capacity to read with genuine understanding occupies a place of special significance. A pupil who merely pronounces words correctly has accomplished only the most superficial part of the reading act; true reading begins when the learner grasps meaning, relates new information to prior experience, and forms an independent opinion about the material. For this reason, contemporary educators increasingly view the reading lesson as a workshop of the mind rather than a rehearsal of pronunciation.

Literary texts are particularly well suited to this purpose. Unlike informational passages that simply transmit facts, a story or a poem invites the reader to enter an imagined world, to sympathize with characters, and to reconstruct events from scattered clues. Such engagement naturally exercises a wide range of mental operations: the child must hold details in memory, anticipate what may happen next, detect motives that the author has left unstated, and pass judgment on the behaviour of the figures portrayed. When these operations are guided systematically, the reading of fiction becomes a powerful instrument for shaping thought.

The present article proposes a coherent technology through which teachers of the primary Reading course can develop their pupils' cognitive skills in a planned and measurable way. By a technology we mean an ordered set of pedagogical actions, each chosen because it activates a particular dimension of thinking and each connected to the others so that they form a continuous progression. The discussion that follows clarifies the theoretical foundations of this approach, describes its successive stages, and reflects on the changes observed in children who learned to read under its guidance.

2. Theoretical Background

The idea that reading and thinking are inseparable has deep roots in educational psychology. Researchers who studied the development of the child's intellect long ago demonstrated that mental functions mature not in isolation but through purposeful activity mediated by language and culture. From this perspective, a literary text functions as a cultural tool: by working with it under a teacher's guidance, the learner gradually internalizes the very operations that the task demands, until those operations become habits of independent thought.

Comprehension itself is now understood as a layered process rather than a single act. At the most basic level the reader recognizes words and recovers their literal sense. At a deeper level he constructs a mental model of the situation described, filling gaps with inferences drawn from his own knowledge of the world. At the highest level the reader evaluates the text, questions its assumptions, and connects it with other experiences. Cognitive skill develops precisely as the child learns to move with ease across these levels, and the teacher's task is to design activities that pull attention upward from the literal toward the interpretive and the critical.

Equally important is the notion that thinking can be taught. The mental operations underlying comprehension — focusing attention, retaining relevant detail, comparing, classifying, inferring, and judging — are not fixed endowments but trainable capacities. When a curriculum makes these operations explicit and gives children repeated, scaffolded practice in performing them, measurable growth follows. The technology described in this article rests on this assumption and translates it into concrete classroom procedure.

3. Cognitive Skills Targeted in the Reading of Literature

Before a teaching technology can be built, the specific abilities it intends to strengthen must be named clearly. Within the reading of literary works at the primary level, five clusters of cognitive skill deserve particular emphasis, each of which can be addressed through carefully chosen textual activity.

The first is directed attention. A young reader is easily distracted, and the ability to hold one's focus on the unfolding text — noticing names, places, and small but telling details — is the precondition for every higher operation. The second is meaningful memory: rather than memorizing words mechanically, the child learns to retain the gist of events and to recall them in proper order, which supports the reconstruction of plot. The third is analytical thinking, by which the learner separates a whole into parts, distinguishes the essential from the incidental, and perceives relationships of cause and effect among the events of a narrative.

The fourth cluster is inference, perhaps the most decisive of all. Skilled readers continually supply information that the author has implied but not stated — the feelings behind a character's words, the reasons for an action, the likely outcome of a choice. The cultivation of this skill turns a passive recipient into an active partner in the construction of meaning. The fifth cluster is evaluative and creative thinking: the child forms a personal judgment about the characters and their conduct, imagines alternative endings, and relates the moral of the story to his own life. Together these five clusters constitute the cognitive horizon toward which the reading lesson should steadily advance.

4. The Proposed Instructional Technology

The technology advanced here organizes the reading lesson into four connected phases, each aligned with the cognitive clusters described above. The phases are sequential, yet they reinforce one another, so that a skill awakened in an earlier stage is exercised again later under more demanding conditions. The teacher moves through them flexibly, adjusting the pace to the difficulty of the text and the readiness of the class.

4.1. The Anticipatory Phase

Before the text is read, the teacher activates what the children already know and arouses their curiosity. Pupils examine the title and any illustrations and are invited to predict what the story might be about. This brief exercise sets attention in motion and creates a horizon of expectation against which the actual events will later be measured. Because the children have committed themselves to a guess, they read the opening with heightened interest, eager to learn whether their prediction holds.

4.2. The Interpretive Reading Phase

During reading the teacher pauses at chosen moments to pose questions that require more than literal recall. Instead of asking only what happened, the teacher asks why a character acted as he did, how he must have felt, and what the reader expects to follow. Such questions compel the child to draw inferences and to monitor his own understanding. Short visualization tasks accompany this phase: pupils are asked to picture a scene in the mind's eye and to describe it, which strengthens imaginative reconstruction and anchors the events in memory.

4.3. The Analytical Phase

Once the text has been read, attention turns to its structure and meaning. The class reconstructs the sequence of events, distinguishes the central episode from supporting detail, and traces the chain of causes that links one event to the next. Comparison plays a leading role here: characters are set against one another, their choices are weighed, and the relationship between a character's traits and his fate is brought to light. Through this work the learner practises analysis, classification, and the disciplined search for evidence within the text.

4.4. The Reflective and Creative Phase

In the final phase the children step back from the text to evaluate it and to make it their own. They judge the conduct of the characters, defend their opinions with reasons drawn from the story, and consider how the situation relates to their own experience. Creative extensions — proposing a different ending, composing a short continuation, or dramatizing a scene — invite the learner to apply understanding in a productive way. This phase consolidates evaluative and creative thinking and leaves the pupil with the sense that reading is an act of personal meaning-making rather than passive reception.

5. Implementation in the Reading Classroom

Putting the technology into practice requires careful preparation rather than additional class time. The teacher begins by selecting a literary text whose length and moral complexity match the pupils' age, ensuring that it offers genuine material for inference and judgment rather than a flat sequence of actions. The lesson is then mapped onto the four phases, and for each phase the teacher drafts a small bank of questions and tasks keyed to the cognitive skill it is meant to develop. Preparing these prompts in advance is essential, because the quality of children's thinking depends directly on the quality of the questions they are asked.

The classroom atmosphere matters as much as the procedure. Pupils must feel free to offer tentative answers without fear of error, since inference and evaluation flourish only where guessing is welcomed and reasoning is valued above the single correct response. The teacher therefore receives every contribution with interest, asks the child to explain the basis of his answer, and encourages classmates to extend or politely challenge it. In this way a community of readers emerges in which thinking aloud becomes the normal mode of work.

Assessment is woven into the process rather than appended to it. By listening to the reasons children give, by examining their predictions and their reconstructed summaries, and by reviewing their creative extensions, the teacher gains a continuous picture of each learner's growth across the five cognitive clusters. This information guides the choice of subsequent texts and the calibration of

question difficulty, so that the technology becomes self-correcting and responsive to the real progress of the class.

6. Results and Discussion

Observation of classrooms in which this technology was applied over the course of a school term revealed encouraging changes in the way children handled literary texts. Pupils who at first answered questions only at the literal level gradually began to volunteer inferences of their own accord, explaining why a character might have behaved in a certain manner before the teacher had asked. The habit of prediction, established in the anticipatory phase, carried over into independent reading, and learners increasingly approached new stories with questions already forming in their minds.

A second noticeable shift concerned the quality of classroom discussion. Where conversation had previously consisted of brief recollections of plot, it came to include disagreement supported by evidence, comparison among characters, and reflection on the relevance of a story to the children's own lives. The reflective and creative phase proved especially fruitful: alternative endings and short continuations not only delighted the pupils but also demonstrated that they had grasped the inner logic of the narrative well enough to extend it convincingly.

These observations should be read with appropriate caution, since they rest on qualitative classroom evidence rather than a controlled experiment, and the influence of the individual teacher cannot be separated entirely from the influence of the method. Nevertheless, the consistency of the pattern across different texts and groups suggests that organizing comprehension instruction around explicit cognitive goals yields benefits that incidental, unstructured questioning does not. The principal lesson for practice is that thinking improves when it is made the deliberate object of the reading lesson rather than its hoped-for by-product.

7. Conclusion

The reading lesson at the primary level holds far greater promise than the mere training of fluency. When literary texts are approached as occasions for thinking, and when the teacher guides the class through a deliberate sequence of anticipation, interpretation, analysis, and reflection, the reading of fiction becomes a discipline of the mind that strengthens attention, memory, inference, and judgment in equal measure. The technology outlined in this article offers teachers a practical framework for achieving this end without sacrificing the pleasure that stories naturally afford.

The decisive insight is that cognitive skills do not arise by accident from contact with texts; they grow when instruction makes them its conscious purpose. A child who is regularly invited to predict, to infer, to compare, and to evaluate gradually acquires these operations as enduring habits of thought that serve him well beyond the reading lesson. Future work may refine the approach through more rigorous measurement and through adaptation to texts of varying genre and difficulty, but the underlying principle is already clear: to teach reading well is, in the truest sense, to teach thinking.

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