THE IMPACT OF CRITICAL READING STRATEGIES ON READING COMPREHENSION AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

JoLynn E. McAlpine

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, MN

May 2019

Capstone Project Facilitator: Trish Harvey
Content Expert: Patricia Sanford
Website Link: Teacher Ready Critical Reading Strategies for Secondary Classrooms

Project Description

This capstone project is a website that houses ready to implement critical reading strategies for secondary classrooms. The research question: *How can using a variety of critical reading strategies and increasing the frequency of their use impact reading comprehension among middle school students?* guided each component of my capstone project. Throughout my teaching career, I have experienced literacy and critical reading take a back seat in many classrooms due to the demand put on today’s educators. Various research has supported the importance of reading comprehension among students. According to Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, and Snowling (2013), “Text can inform and develop knowledge, provide us with new vocabulary and provoke new ways of thinking” (p. 1).

Learning to comprehend and understand a variety of text materials can open many doors for students. Reading is the framework for many academic classes and as students grow older reading materials are used as support when learning complicated concepts (Ness, 2007). The lack of reading skills could prevent students from being successful in many academic classes. According to Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), reading comprehension can be enhanced when various skills are taught properly. Reading comprehension difficulties can be prevented by the frequent use of skills. These skills include vocabulary development, the structure of language, and specific comprehension
strategies such as summarizing and predicting. It is crucial for students to practice the
skill of reading in order to enhance comprehension levels (p. 6).

My reasoning behind choosing the topic of reading comprehension is that I have
witnessed many overworked teachers allow literacy to take a back seat in their
classrooms due to reasons such as content coverage or standardized test scores. If
educators do not take enough time to focus on reading comprehension skills and the
critical reading process in students this potentially produces lower levels of learning,
frustration among students, and lower test scores. I think it is crucial to bring awareness
to the importance of reading comprehension skills and the critical reading process as well
as provide tools for educators who wear multiple hats throughout their school days that
are accessible and easy to implement.

I chose a website format for my project as I feel that it was the best way to make
resources easily accessible for twenty-first-century educators. The use of technology has
become a part of everyday life as an educator. Teaching has become a public entity.
Teachers once referred to books and journals when looking for resources to expand their
knowledge and teaching in the classroom and now many of the resources teachers obtain
come directly from the web (Lieberman & Pointer, 2010). I feel that is important to use
twenty-first-century technology to house critical reading strategies as educators are
expected to develop and change their teaching practices as society adapts.

The website is set up to house critical reading strategies in three main forms, these
include vocabulary strategies, summarization strategies, and paraphrasing strategies. The
home page of the site includes the “why” for using critical reading strategies to increase
student reading comprehension as well as my own personal journey and passion for this project. Links across the bottom of the home page take the user to the strategies they are interested in.
The first link is to the vocabulary strategies. I include three specific strategies. One on how to decode words using context clues, one that uses the Frayer model and a strategy that allows students to self identify difficult words.

**Decoding Words Using Context Clues**

**Purpose:** Using words with multiple meanings and utilizing context clues and illustrations to identify word definitions.

**Directions:** In this strategy students are given multiple meaning words and asked to find definitions and create examples of where these words would be used (depending on their definition). Students also identify context clues within the their example sentences as well as find visuals to help clarify the meaning of the word. Students create their own glossary.

**Strategy #1 - Decoding words using Context Clues**

[Click this link to view this strategy in a new window!]

**The Frayer Model**

**Purpose:** The Frayer model allows students to identify the meaning of vocabulary words by breaking the word apart using multiple pieces as well as identifying nonexamples and synonyms.

**Directions:** Have each student complete a puzzle piece chart on 1 vocabulary word. (You can adapt the puzzle pieces to have students identify specific things relating to the word, for example, if you are using this for math, instead of having students draw a picture you could show an example). When students are finished the educator makes copies of each.

**Strategy #2 - The Frayer Model**

[Click this link to view this strategy in a new window!]

**Vocabulary Self- Identified**

**Purpose:** This strategy is for students to self identify difficult or important vocabulary words in a text. This strategy is typically used the lesson prior to reading and analyzing a text. By identifying these words before they read the text they are able to collaborate, discuss, and define the words ahead of time to better understand the text.

**Directions:** Students skim the text and identify (either by highlighting or underlining) words they don't know as well as words they think are important to the purpose of the text. The teacher asks the students to share these words. Then, the students collaboratively define the words and fill out the Frayer chart.
The next link includes three paraphrasing strategies. One strategy uses the RAP model, one using challenge cards, and one that uses a graphic organizer to paraphrase.

**Paraphrasing using the RAP model**

**R** - Read.

**A** - Ask yourself “What was the main idea?”

**P** - Put the main idea into your own words.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this strategy is for students to learn how to paraphrasing by breaking it up into steps. Students read the text, practice locating the main ideas of the text, and learn how to use the main ideas to paraphrase the text in their own words. This will ultimately improve the students understanding of what was read.

**Strategy #1- Paraphrasing using the RAP model**

**Paraphrasing - Challenge Cards**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this strategy is to have students practice the skill of paraphrasing by adapting single sentences. Once students have mastered paraphrasing sentences they can move on to paraphrasing larger texts. This is a great activity for students to do either in partners, or when they finish early with an assignment. Students could also have their own set of cards and have a race to see who can accurately paraphrase all of the sentences first. Teachers can adapt the cards to fit their content area, or have students create their own cards related to specific topics and have them trade to practice new sentences.

**Strategy #2- Paraphrasing Challenge Cards**

Click this link to view this strategy in a new window!
The third link includes three strategies to summarize. These strategies include having students use a money strategy to make summarizing a game for students. I also include a framework strategy for breaking down a text into individual parts before summarizing, and lastly, a strategy called erasing and trading which teaches students to remove unnecessary information from the text when summarizing.
The fourth link includes four other critical reading strategies related to marking the text, charting the text, using synonyms to make connections, and a fun vocabulary graffiti activity.

The fifth link is all about differentiation for different levels of learners as well as giving students voice and choice in their learning. I have included a vocabulary choice board that can be used with any set of vocabulary words. Students are able to choose three different options. They choose how they would like to learn the words, how to practice them, and then how to demonstrate their learning. This link also includes a chart.
that gives tips for how to modify for lower learners and how to adapt strategies for higher levels of learning. The last thing included on this page is a google form tracker that educators can copy and adapt to fit their needs. The google form allows students to give feedback on the critical reading strategy they used in class and whether or not it increased their understanding of the text.

The website includes a “get connected” section. This page gives the information to my educational twitter page where I share critical reading ideas. I also include a list of other influential educators to follow on twitter as well as a link to Twitter so educators visiting the site can create their own account. The last page in the website are the references I used in building the site.
The website is a starting point for teachers to easily implement critical reading strategies into their classrooms on a more frequent basis to increase reading comprehension levels among students. Educators using these strategies have the flexibility to copy them and adapt them to fit their classroom needs as well as the needs for various levels of learners. The resources I have provided will remind educators of the importance of literacy development in all content areas. By creating a multitude of strategies and housing them in a website format, teachers can access them without having to take the time to create individual critical reading strategies. I believe that we are better teachers when we collaborate, share, and work together.
References


Heeling P. Skitter Photo. Words.

https://skitterphoto.com/photos/3045/words

Interventions for Reading Comprehension: Paraphrasing Strategies. Reconstructed Memory Experiment.

https://msu.edu/course/cep/886/Reading%20Comprehension/9Learn_Serv_Proj_Paraphrasing.html


doi:10.1177/0022487109347319


doi:10.1177/003172170708900314

Pixabay, L. J. Ballpoint pen on open-ended notebook.
Pixabay. (n. d.) Person behind books.

https://www.pexels.com/photo/adult-blur-books-close-up-261909/


