

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

Teaching Online Reading Comprehension Donald Leu



“With Internet Reciprocal Teaching, students and teachers teach one another useful strategies to use while reading on the Internet.”

Reading comprehension is something we can not see. It happens in the recesses of our mind, hidden from view. How do we make the invisible, visible to our students? This is the central challenge of reading comprehension instruction. The most effective teaching methods make invisible strategies visible (Hacker & Tenent, 2002; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Think clouds are one example.

We now face an additional challenge. Continuously new online reading comprehension skills emerge from continuously new technologies. How do we teach something that is so new we are also still learning about it? In this challenge lies an opportunity.

Internet Reciprocal Teaching (IRT)

Internet Reciprocal Teaching (IRT) is based on Reciprocal Teaching principles (See Leu, et. al., in press). With IRT, students and teachers teach one another useful strategies to use while reading on the Internet.

How To Teach? IRT is a three-phase instructional model:

1. Direct instruction of basic computer and Internet use skills (when necessary);
2. Exchange of effective online reading strategies in small groups or whole class contexts;
3. Independent inquiry with the exchange of effective online reading strategies.

What Online Reading Comprehension Skills and Strategies Do We Teach?

- Which search engine do I use? Why?
- How do I read search engine results?
- How do I critically evaluate the reliability of a site like Save the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus?

The skills and strategies necessary to answer these questions are the new literacy skills of online reading comprehension need to be taught if we want our students to be fully prepared for the 21st century. These skills and strategies include the following: Generating Important Questions; Locating Information; Critically Evaluating Information; Synthesizing Information and Communicating Information. (For a complete description of these skills see Leu, et. al., in press).

Using IRT: Two Examples of Strategy Exchange

Reading Search Engines Results Most students never read search engine results. Instead, they use a “click and look” strategy, clicking on the top result, and looking quickly to see if the site looks promising. Gradually they work their way down the results page, clicking and looking, without reading a single word from the search engine results.

This impedes their ability to quickly locate the information they require. Here is an IRT strategy to help students learn about reading the results page of a search engine:

1. Select an author you are reading (e.g. John Phillip Santos).
2. Enter that author's name in a search engine and obtain the results page.
3. Print out copies of this search engine results page and distribute it to your class.
4. Have groups or the entire class use the results page to answer these questions: "Which link would you select:
 - to hear John Phillip Santos reading from his works?
 - to hear an interview with John Phillip Santos?
 - to read an essay by John Phillip Santos?"
5. After students provide each correct answer, make certain they explain the strategy they used. Ask, "Tell us how you figured that out?" ("I read the paragraph under each entry and this one said it had audio files of him reading aloud. That probably means he will be reading his work.")
6. Now have the students ask new questions about other items on the same page, e.g., "Which link would you select if you wanted to read about...?" Invite other students to answer these questions and explain their strategies.

The Critical Evaluation of Web Sites We want students to be "healthy skeptics" when they read online. Most are not. Here is an activity that will encourage students to be more critical readers:

1. Locate a spoof site, a site that looks reliable but provides completely false information. Use a search engine and search for "spoof sites." Locate sites such as *Dog Island* (<http://www.thedogisland.com/>) or *Save the Guinea Worm Foundation* (<http://www.deadlysins.com/guineaworm/index.htm>). Ask students, "Is this site: a) very reliable; b) sort of reliable; or c) not at all reliable? Why do you think so?"
2. Have your students work in small groups or work with the whole class to discuss their evaluation of each site. Ask them to also share the reading strategies they used to reach this evaluation. Did they use a search engine to see what others said about this site? Did they go to www.snopes.com to see if it was rated as a bogus site? Develop a list of useful evaluation strategies and post this in your room.

Modeled Strategy

See pp. 629 and 677 for point-of-use notes modeling these strategies.

Teacher Resources

- *Professional Development Guidebook*
- *Classroom Strategies and Teaching Routines cards*

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Supporting Research

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Rosenshine, B., & Meister, C. (1994). Reciprocal teaching: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 64, 479-530.