Improving Teaching and Learning

Perspectives

from

Australia & Southeast Asia

Edited by

Kevin Laws, Lesley Harbon & Christabel Wescombe

Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia

DEPISA
Monograph no. 3
DEPISA acknowledges the generous support of Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand, Can Tho University, Vietnam, Suratthani Rajabhat University, Thailand, and Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia, and National University of Laos for hosting DEPISA conferences and contributing to the publication of proceedings and monographs in 2013 and 2014.


Cover: DEPISA members at Suratthani Rajabhat University, June, 2014.
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Examining the Effectiveness of Visual Imagery Classes on Authentic and Modified Texts in EFL Reading

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Abstract
This research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of visual imagery in reading activities practised by Junior High School students in Jakarta. In the investigation two classes were chosen in which both practised visual imagery in reading but one class read authentic texts whereas the other studied modified ones. For that purpose, two authentic, narrative texts and their modified equivalences were carefully selected and used as the material of instruction. At the completion of the study both classes were tested using the same instrument. Scores of the tests were calculated and compared using an independent t-test. In addition, classroom observations were conducted to analyse varieties of imagery practised by students in both classes. The research reveals the following:

1. Students who studied modified texts received higher scores compared to those who read authentic materials.

2. Kinds and forms of imagery made by students using modified texts varied from one student to another.

3. Students using authentic texts tend to practise less interesting imageries.

4. Students in the reading class with modified texts show higher activities compared to those using authentic materials.

5. There is significant difference in achievement between students in the class using authentic texts and those in the class using modified texts.

Introduction
An early study of imagery in education was conducted by Norton (2001), and Kanno & Norton (2003) who claimed that a conception of imagined communities (IC) might affect the understanding of learning in two forms: temporal and spatial dimensions. The first refers to the notion that IC facilitates learners to pull forward their visions of the future to their prevailing actions and identities. The latter examines inter-relationship between individual learner’s identities and the influence of globalisation and transnationalism on language learning and identity construction.

It was Anderson (1991) who first coined the term imagined communities arguing that what we think of as nations are imagined communities because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The example below might help to render our comprehension more concrete.

Norton (2000) describes the story of Katarina and the investment by her IC professional community. Katarina was an immigrant from Poland who wished to take a computer course
in Canada after having attended English as a second language (ESL) class for some period of time. Discouraged by her ESL teacher, saying that her English was not adequate to take the course, Katarina was insulted and never returned to her ESL class. The degree to which Katarina reacted seemed to appear extreme and destructive. However, Norton argued that such a reaction was significantly comprehensible related to Katarina’s investment in her IC, that is a community of professionals in her home country.

For Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) what happened to Katarina relates to what is the so called non-participation engagement, a situation in which learners cannot fully and physically engage with their surrounding in class activities. In respect to non-participation engagement, Lave and Wenger point out two conditions: peripheral and marginal engagement. The distinction between peripherality and marginality is useful to explain Katarina’s case. According to Lave and Wenger peripherality refers to the fact that some degree of non-participation can become an enabling factor of participation, while the term marginality refers to a form of non-participation that prevents full participation. I believe it is the first condition - peripheral engagement - that Katarina decided to choose so that she could overcome her case and finally succeed.

The above argument might draw one significant conclusion saying it is the imagination that drives people to succeed under any circumstances. This is no wonder why Einstein stated that imagination is more important than knowledge and I believe it is in this respect that Covey put one of his seven habits saying ‘Begin with the end in mind’. It is the ability to envision in our mind what we cannot at present see with our eyes (Covey, 1989). When it is taken for granted that imagination, when properly managed, might facilitate success, there must be something teachers could do to drive their students to gain success in learning.

How imagination facilitates learning is complicated but possible to explain because humans are capable of making connections with communities that lie beyond the local and direct environment (Anderson, 1991). It is in this connection that Picasso once said, ‘I paint what I think, not what I see.’ What Picasso stated is comprehensible for Lave & Wenger as they argue that learning actually takes place in two forms of activities called engagement and imagination. The first refers to a tangible interaction between learners and their concrete and immediate environment, and the latter is an imaginative interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger 1998). In the field of language learning, however, empirical evidence showing the relationship between imagery and language acquisition in EFL or ESL classes is scant (Canning, 2001). Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate how imagery might facilitate learning in students.

The researchers (Belcher, 1994; Casanave, 1998; Toohey, 2000; and Kano and Norton, 2003) claim evidence that imagery facilitates language learning. More specifically Keene & Zimmermann (2007) stated there is ample evidence that visual imagery, the ability to build mental pictures or images, facilitates students in a reading class. Such is possible when they associate words on the page with images and memories of their lives. It is evident that their own visualisations would greatly depend upon their prior knowledge and engagement with the topic. In addition, if we are able to construct any mental image from what we read, it is likely that our understanding of the material will be greater than had we not (Gambrell & Jawitz, 1993). In this respect, Chamot calls imagery a metacognitive strategy which is characterised by the application of prior knowledge to comprehend new problems, whereas Brown (2004) calls it schemata in which background information and cultural experience is always present to carry out interpretation effectively in a reading activity.
In this regard, Keene & Zimmermann (2007) identified seven principal comprehension strategies practised by good readers when they read, three of which strongly relate to imagination or mental activities. The strategies include:

1. monitoring for meaning—knowing when you know, knowing when you don’t know;
2. using and creating schema—making connections between the new and the known, building and activating background knowledge;
3. asking questions—generating questions before, during, and after reading that lead you deeper into the text;
4. determining importance—deciding what matters most, what is worth remembering;
5. inferring—combining background knowledge with information from the text to predict, conclude, make judgments, and interpret;
6. using sensory and emotional images—creating mental images to deepen and stretch meaning, and
7. synthesising — creating an evolution of meaning by combining understanding with knowledge from other texts or sources.

In this article, Keene & Zimmermann’s three strategies related to mental activities are elaborated to facilitate students in EFL reading classes. Below is the elaboration taken from the same resource (Keene & Zimmermann 2007).

1. **Using and creating schema**
   Schema is the way students connect the new to the known, recall relevant information, and further their comprehension, with prior knowledge. Researchers have shown that students will understand what they are reading better if they think about their own experiences as they read. To arouse experiences, teachers might apply helpful hints, such as (a) use an excerpt or extract of any passage as material for discussion, (b) raise probing questions, (c) discuss the importance of personal connections with the text content.

2. **Inferring**
   To infer is to create a personal and unique meaning from a text. A proficient reader creates meaning that is neither stated explicitly in the text nor is shown in the illustrations. Inferring also deals with the ability to think aloud to involve activities of modeling and demonstration in day-to-day comprehension instruction. Inferences are based in part on individual life experience and knowledge of the reader.

3. **Using sensory and emotional images**
   Creating images while we read allows us to bring the text to life. Images originate in our senses and combine with our emotions. The images that we create while we read have little meaning unless we associate them with words on the page along with other images and memories of our lives. Students need explicit instruction to develop their image-making abilities. They need to understand how their images help them to better comprehend what they read.
In line with the above description, Draper (2010) identified six characteristics of proficient readers – all of which relate to the activities of imagery, as follows:

Proficient readers

- spontaneously and purposefully create mental images while and after reading;
- use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read;
- use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct and unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read;
- adapt their images as they continue to read;
- understand and articulate how creating images enhances their comprehension; and
- change and modify their images in response to images that other readers share.

In addition, the following ways might be practised by smart readers before, during and after reading. Before reading, students visually organise their thinking by visualising possible content, linking background knowledge and forming predictions. During reading, they visualise the content by comparing predictions with ideas, themes and information in the text. This is to form a visual representation of what they are reading. After reading they visually link new information with prior knowledge, visually represent what they have read in a graphic summary, and build new understanding.

In more specific steps, Draper (2010) summarised some techniques of visualising, three of which are discussed and used to empower students to benefit from their power of imagery in reading. The three techniques of visualising are presented in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think aloud.</td>
<td>To demonstrate when, why and how students visualise while reading.</td>
<td>• Explain how to create images in the mind when reading. This is done by taking a part of the text to read aloud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Begin reading, pause to verbalise thinking to create images.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reveal how images are created in the mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Explain how to select words and phrases in the text to connect with own personal experiences and prior knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve five senses to create visual images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Describe how creating the image helped them to understand and enjoy what is happening in the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Techniques of visualising
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Gallery images.   | To create mental images while reading.                 | • Explain the concept of using images to represent information by showing examples of different images representing different content concepts.  
• Discuss in small groups how images correspond to information.  
• Have students read a section of chosen text and create 2 to 4 images to represent the content.  
• Start a gallery on a classroom or hallway wall to exhibit images. |
| Story wheel.      | To help students visualise story.                      | • Teacher prepares story wheels prior to lesson. It is a circle divide into 6-8 pie segments with a smaller circle in the centre of the larger circle.  
• Students read a story.  
• After completing the story, students list the important events in the story. Remind them that the events should be chosen from the beginning, middle and end of story.  
• Next, have students divide the list of events into a list of 6—8, depending on pie pieces.  
• Students write the events on the pie segments. |

To assess the activity of visualisation in reading class, a scoring rubric is used, adapted from Draper’s compilation. Table 2 is such a rubric.

### Table 2. Scoring rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score criteria</th>
<th>0=Minimal</th>
<th>1 = Basic</th>
<th>2= Proficient</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture show communicates literal understanding of the text.</td>
<td>No images or images bear no relationship to text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate one or two items directly mentioned in text, may be peripheral details.</td>
<td>Images illustrate key elements of character, setting and events in text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate key element of charter, setting and events in text. Images are detailed and students can describe additional details from mental image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture show communicates main concepts and demonstrate ability to understand ad acquire information from text.</td>
<td>No images; or images that illustrate only literal understanding of words in text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate more than simple objects mentioned in text. Images demonstrate some understanding of concepts or relationships, but main concepts are missing.</td>
<td>Students combined the author’s words with own background knowledge to understand the text. Images illustrate understanding of key concepts and relationships.</td>
<td>Images extend or enhance the text with student’s own interpretation. Students can explain his/her inferences and communicate what was learned from the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

This mixed methods research was conducted using a sequential explanatory design in which qualitative data were used to enhance, complement, and follow up quantitative findings (Creswell, 2008). In this design quantitative and qualitative data were collected sequentially in two phases.

Quantitative data were collected using a teacher-made test to assess students' achievement in EFL reading class. For that purpose two classes of Junior Secondary Schools, in which one class consisted of 29 students and the other 27, provided the empirical data related with the topic. Both classes were taught using steps and procedures of visual imagery in reading but the reading texts were different; one class read authentic texts and the other class modified texts. During the process of teaching reading the three Keene & Zimmermann's strategies were applied, i.e., creating schemata, inferring, and using sensory and emotional images. These strategies were carried out in Activity 1, think aloud, as proposed by Draper. This is to say that students were asked to think aloud, while reading, to demonstrate how they visualised the three mental activities: making schemata, making inferences, and using sensory and emotion.

Steps to practise think aloud activity, as proposed by Draper, are presented as follows:

- Teacher explains to students how to create images in mind when reading a text.
- Teacher chooses a part of a text to read aloud.
- Begin reading. Pause to verbalise the thinking and the images that are being created in mind.
- Reveal how images are created in mind.
- Explain to students how to select rich words from the text, connected with personal experiences and prior knowledge. Teachers might pull phrases from the text that connect to the five senses to create visual image.
- Describe to students how creating the image can help understand and enjoy what is happening in the text.
The other two activities of visualisation - story wheel and gallery images - were used to illustrate the end products as far as visual imagery in a reading class is concerned.

Qualitative data were collected using a rubric, as earlier discussed. Forms of a story wheel and a gallery images used by students to express their imagery in reading can be found in the appendices. Steps and procedures to operate a story wheel and gallery images are presented below.

1. Steps and procedures to operate story wheel:
   - Teacher prepares a story wheel prior to lesson.
   - Students read a story, reading text.
   - Students list important events chosen from beginning, middle, and end of the story.
   - Students divide the list of events into the pie segments.
   - Students write the events on the pie segments.
   - Students start to illustrate the events on the corresponding segments.
   - Students write the story title and author's name in the centre circle.
   - Students might post the story wheels in the reading centre or on a classroom kiosk or booth.

2. Steps and procedures to operate gallery walls:
   - Teacher explains the concept of using images to represent information. S/he can show 2 or 3 samples of different images representing different content area concepts. Discuss how images correspond to information.
   - In small groups, have students read a section of text and create 2-4 images to represent the content. Students share images with classmates.
   - Start a gallery on a classroom or hallway wall to exhibit images.

The quantitative data were analysed using an independent t-test formula. This is to confirm if there is significant difference between mean scores of both classes under level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) and degrees of freedom = 54. For such confirmation two hypotheses were formulated, i.e. $H_0$, saying there is no difference between mean scores of the class with authentic text and that with modified text, and $H_1$ saying there is difference between mean scores of the class with authentic text and that with modified text. The confidence level of statistical significance is based on the following 'p' values, such as that 'p' < .05 which means the difference is significant and $H_0$ should be rejected.
Results

1. Quantitative data

The use of t-tests presented a ‘p’ value = .000 which is lower than that of .05 (‘p’ < .05). This means that the hypothesis, saying there is no difference between mean scores of the class with authentic text, could be rejected. In other words there is significant difference between mean scores of the two classes being studied in this research.

2. Qualitative data

Using the scoring rubric to assess students’ imagery in reading, the research reports the following results:

- Kinds and forms of imagery made by students in class with modified reading text vary from one student to another.
- Students in class with authentic text made less interesting imagery.
- Students in class with modified text show higher activities than those of authentic text.

Discussion

The statement by Gambrell & Jawitz (1993), that creating mental images while reading will facilitate comprehension, is not surprising when it is related to schema theory. Only after the schema is activated is one able to see or hear what he/she is reading (Harmer, 2001). Visual imagery or imagination in a broader context deals with the involvement of prior knowledge to build mental pictures. In a reading activity such an involvement might be articulated by associating words in the text with images and memories of the readers’ lives (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). The notion of association in this regard is central and will be effective when it is personally meaningful to individual learners (Oxford, 1990). Since each reader has different background knowledge, it is culture specific (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). This implies, in a broader context, that certain reading texts might facilitate readers to generate their schemata by which visual imagery appears.

Therefore, this research deliberately set apart two different kinds of text, one is authentic and the other modified.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, including the previous explanation, some conclusions can be stated as follows:

From the quantitative analysis

1. Scores of student achievement in the class with modified text are different from those in the class with authentic text. Mean score of the first class is 81.44 and mean score of the second class is 65.59.

2. The ‘p’ value is less than .005 which means there are significantly different scores of achievement between the classes.
From the qualitative analysis

1. Kinds and forms of imagery made by students in class with modified reading texts varied from one student to another.

2. Students in the reading class with modified texts showed higher activities compared to those using authentic materials.

3. Students in the class with authentic texts practised less interesting imageries.

References


Appendices

1. A Story Wheel (Draper, 2010)

Notes:

1. Student’s name and the story title are written in the small circle in the middle.

2. Imaginary events are drawn in the pie segments.

3. Teachers may have their students number the events.

Procedure:

1. Teacher prepares a story wheel prior to lesson.

2. Students read a story, reading text.

3. Students list important events: chosen from beginning, middle, and end of the story.

4. Students divide the list of events into the pie segments.

5. Students write the events on the pie segments.

6. Students start to illustrate the events on the corresponding segments.
7. Students write the story title and author's name in the centre circle.

8. Students might post the story wheels in the reading centre or on a classroom kiosk or booth.

2. Gallery Wall (taken from Draper (2010))

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</table>

Legend: 1 = Title and student name; 2 = Imaginary illustration; 3 = Description.

Procedure:

1. Teacher explains the concept of using images to represent information. S/he can show 2 or 3 samples of different images representing different content area concepts. Discuss how images correspond to information.

2. In small groups, have students read a section of text and create 2-4 images to represent the content. Students share images with classmates.

3. Start a gallery on a classroom or hallway wall to exhibit images.