Teacher Development Through Reading Strategy Instruction: The Story Of Supriya

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Abstract

Despite the awareness that a large number of instructors of English teaching in the state board schools of Orissa, India are not good readers themselves, little has been done to investigate this area. This paper presents the findings from an exploratory study that focused on the development of in-service teachers when a reading strategy instruction program was offered to them. The presentation of this study is done through the description of a single case of a teacher named Supriya. Data for the study were collected at different times before and during the program, through: a questionnaire, interviews, participant diaries, a researcher's journal and think-aloud protocols. These data were analyzed qualitatively. It is through the story of Supriya that the author presents her analysis supporting the findings that the reading strategy instruction program has the potential to assist in teacher development.

Introduction

Language teacher education programs in India generally assume that the trainee teachers are proficient users of the second language that they teach, that is, English. Therefore, few of these programs, whether pre-service or in-service, make provision for improving the teacher's English proficiency. This is not surprising, as second language proficiency is the basic requirement of a second language teacher. However, there is a wide gap between what should be and what is. Many of the instructors of English in the state board schools [1] in Orissa (India) have very little exposure to English. Not only for teaching, but even to assimilate the professional aspects of the courses they attend, whether it be pre-service or in-service, they need to be proficient in English, as English

is the medium of instruction in training colleges and in-service courses. This proficiency component, however, seems to be lacking in most of the training programs in India. There is a need to offer such a program to assist teachers in improving their language proficiency to enable them to develop more effectiveness.

Of the four language skills that learners need to acquire, reading is the most important skill in the Indian context. English in India is typically a language of written communication. It holds official language status, and as such, all inter-state official correspondence is conducted in English. In addition, it is the language of higher education; the majority of literate people in India use English for reading and writing as part of their everyday life.

Reading Strategies Defined

Barnett (1988) calls reading strategies the mental operations involved when readers approach a text effectively and make sense of what they read. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) identify better readers as having better ability to summarize and make effective use of background knowledge. They also use the structure of the text, make inferences, have an awareness of the strategies they employ and in general they are better at monitoring and adjusting the strategies they use. Thus better readers are more strategic.

Hosenfield (1977) identifies a good reader as one who tries to keep the meaning of the passage in mind, reads in chunks, ignores less important words, tries to guess the meanings of unknown words using contextual clues, and has a good concept of himself /herself as a reader. Following these studies, there have been attempts to instruct learners in using these strategies to make them better readers (Carrell, 1989; Block, 1992; Victori & Lockhart, 1995). These studies show a positive correlation between reading strategy instruction and reading proficiency.

Strategy Training in a Language Teacher Education Context

The literature seems unanimous in its indication that strategy instruction would imply a new model in the teaching-learning scenario, which would necessitate a new role for teachers (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Kupper, 1985). To live up to this new role, teachers need the essential orientation that would equip them for the changes that this paradigm entails. Strategy training in reading is thus crucial in the context of imparting teacher education in India.

A significant aspect of strategy instruction in the classroom is the impact it can have on teachers and learners in relation to their traditional roles. To teachers, it may appear as if they will be redundant as a result of making the learners autonomous. In fact, the phantom of a changed scenario may frighten some teachers because they may feel that their status is being challenged. But teachers have to know that though their traditional roles may change but their new roles will be more varied and creative (Ely & Pease-

Alvarez, 1996; Oxford, 1990).

In education, there is a demand for learner autonomy. But learner autonomy is not possible without teacher autonomy. The success of learner autonomy, which is dependent on learner training, will always hang on the "nature of pedagogical dialogue" (Little, 1995, p. 175), which will be positively inclined towards autonomy if only the teacher is a believer in its value. This will be facilitated when teachers are instructed in the use of learner strategies so that they are aware of the value of autonomy. If, in the teacher education context, teachers are subjected to the same kind of negotiation that we expect them to have with their learners, and if they are exposed to the same kind of risk that they are asking their learners to take, they will be able to empathize with the learners and give them support in weaning from dependence to autonomy. This is especially important in the Indian context where the teacher's role--even today--is that of a giver of knowledge.

The program presented here was designed with the above rationale. It is called Reading Strategy Instruction Program (RSIP) and it was designed for an in-service teacher education program.

Research Context

This study was carried out at the English Language Teaching Institute (ELTI), Orissa, an institute set up by the government to provide in-service training to high school teachers, with a view towards improving the quality of English teaching. In addition, one of its objectives is to give instruction for diploma certificate courses in ELT. The diploma course has six components divided into units. While the course makes provision for the development of spoken and writing proficiency of the teachers, no mention is made of improving their reading skills. There is a component on reading, but its purpose is to acquaint the teachers with current methodological approaches for developing the reading skills of their learners. (How they should do this successfully without having the same skills themselves is not clear.) It is in one of these diploma courses that I carried out the present study.

I here present one of the study participants--Supriya [2]. Supriya's background, her participation in this study, how she coped with the program, what she did and did not gain will be central to the paper. It is through Supriya that this paper will put forward the findings of the RSIP.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the following questions:

1. What was Supriya's response to the reading strategy instruction program? Did she accept or reject different aspects of it?

2. In what ways did the reading strategy instruction help Supriya become a more strategic reader?
3. In what ways did the reading strategy instruction help Supriya develop as a teacher of reading?

Methodology

The study presented here was conducted within the exploratory-interpretative paradigm suggested by Grotjahn (1987). It does not propose to verify a hypothesis by trying to establish a causal relationship between variables, that is, the use of RSIP and development of reading proficiency. Rather it seeks to understand the 'why' of the actions of the participants of the study as they worked though the RSIP.

In order to collect data for the study, it was essential to focus on a restricted number of participants. This helped in the investigation and assisted in observing the effect of the RSIP closely. This approach of using cases was particularly suitable for this study as my purpose was to "enhance . . . understanding of, and solve problems related to [my] own professional workplace" (Nunan, 1992, p. 89).

Participants

Fifty secondary school teachers were selected for the pilot study, and 48 for the main study. They had been selected for two consecutive diploma courses at the ELTI. These teachers were representative of high school teachers of English in Orissa, and they were selected randomly. They were graduates with a degree in teacher training and high school teaching experience ranging from five to twenty years. However, they did not necessarily have any training in teaching English since the course "Methods of Teaching English" is optional in all the training colleges in Orissa. Thus teachers who teach English may or may not be trained to teach the language.

Most participants in the study were over the age of 40 and required reading glasses, though very few of them owned them. In addition, most of them did not have a dictionary or a grammar book of their own. In spite of this, there was a great variance in the attitude of these teachers towards the program, ranging from enthusiasm to indifference.

As previously stated, five informants were selected for a closer study. These informants were the main source of in-depth data. These informants were selected because of their willingness to participate in this study. Most of the data collected through interviews and TA were collected outside of class hours. Additionally, informants were expected to update their diaries regularly. So the informants' willingness to participate was the most important criterion for their selection. The five informants agreed to participate in the study after being informed about its purpose and their role in it. Supriya, whose story is presented here, was representative of the five informants.

Supriya. Supriya was a highly qualified 44-year-old female teacher with a master's degree in English literature. She had been teaching in a rural school in Orissa in secondary classes for sixteen years. This school educates tribal children, and there is always pressure on the teachers to highlight the examination performance of the students. The teachers' jobs depended on the exam success of the students. In addition to regular educational authorities, the Director and other visitors with political status visited the school, since performance of the tribal students is a sensitive issue with the Indian government. The students, on the other hand, appear to have little motivation to learn because they seemed to be content with their own situation. These schools are residential schools, so teachers had the additional task of looking after the students' personal welfare. As a result, they have little free time. In addition to all these issues, Supriya commuted to work every day, which took about 3.5 to 4 hours. She was not able to do any personal reading. Her main concern was the number of students passing the school exit examination.

Supriya had had all her education as a private student, and learned the content of the English textbooks she used at all levels through her native language. As a result, she had very little exposure to English. As a teacher, she did not read anything in English either except the assigned student textbooks. To understand the content of these books, she availed herself of the key books[3]. She was not able to read well.

In many ways, Supriya was representative of the secondary school teachers of Orissa. She was an experienced teacher of English, teaching at the secondary level. She had a degree in teaching English without having any training in teaching English. Like others in the group, she had problems with English language proficiency. And like the others, she did not own a pair of reading glasses. (However, she was one of the first teachers to buy a pair when I suggested this in class.)

Role of the researcher. My position as the tutor of the course and the researcher was complex. In my interaction with the informants, I had to arrive at a balance between maintaining the right degree of distance and closeness. I was their tutor, and culturally they were accustomed to a teacher who was distant and one who knew all the answers. Under such circumstances, they were not likely to reveal their real thoughts to me, in case it cast them in a negative light. They needed to trust me, but I could not afford to get too close to them, lest I lost the objectivity needed to complete the study. This tension remained all through the study because I was aware of McNeill's (1990) caution against "the researcher going native" (p. 70).

There was another related issue. Occasionally, in order to triangulate data, I had to crosscheck findings from one source with another, for example, the findings from the diary with an interview. It was possible to antagonize the informants in case they said contradictory things.

Winning Supriya's trust was not difficult. She looked for opportunities to practice her

English with me, which may be one of her reasons for joining the study. Supriya liked to spend after class hours with me discussing her problems at school. She was involved with her students and was a dedicated teacher. She also talked to me about her family.

Instruments

For the purpose of the study, data were collected through a variety of instruments. A reading strategy questionnaire was administered to the whole class at the beginning as well as at the end of the program. Students were asked to keep diaries, recording their responses to the strategy training classes and any other related information. Simultaneously, I kept a journal to record my own perceptions of these classes. Think-aloud protocols while doing reading tasks during the course of the program were recorded from five selected informants and used as data for the study. Substantial time was spent in training the informants to participate in the think-aloud process, as is recommended (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Kavale & Schreiner, 1979; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). It is an integral part of procedures for collecting think aloud data (Nassaji, 2003, 2004). The think-aloud protocols in the present study were a primary source of data, showing Supriya's, as well as others', use of reading strategies. In addition to this, three semi-structured interviews administered to the five informants at different stages were used as instruments for data collection.

Procedure

The pilot study was done through a questionnaire, which was piloted and modified at the end of that course. Another data collection instrument, verbal reports, was also tried out at the pilot stage to see its efficacy. The main study was then carried out with the group of 48 in-service trainee teachers. It was conducted at two levels - the macro-level which involved all the 48 participants of the course and the micro-level, which used only five informants for an in-depth study. The reading strategies the teachers had used prior to the program were determined through a questionnaire[4]. Additional in-depth information regarding their strategy use prior to the program was collected at the micro-level through an interview and a paired think-aloud task after intensive training in thinking aloud. All 48 participants were then given 20 hours of instruction over three months through the RSIP. During the program, in order to observe their improvement in reading and use of reading strategies, data were again collected through think-aloud protocols and interviews with the five informants selected for the micro-level of study. Information from the rest of the class was collected through informant diaries. Finally, the reading strategy questionnaire was again given to the participants. Data from different sources were analyzed and, on the basis of the analysis, interpretations were made.

Description of the RSIP. The RSIP is a loosely woven program in which teachers were involved in choosing and completing reading tasks using suitable strategies. They

watched the tutor and their peers model the use of reading strategies and tried to apply them to new tasks. This helped them to develop their awareness of the reading process. In addition, they became sensitive to the skills required of a reading instructor.

The RSIP was designed after surveying literature in both general language learning strategies and reading strategies. The program was designed with thirty tasks divided into two parts. Before the strategy training began, an introduction to reading strategies was done through five tasks. These tasks not only served as an introduction to the program, but also helped to familiarize the participants with the meta-language required for discussion during the subsequent sessions. In addition, the tasks that represented the teachers' beliefs about reading and their role as teachers of reading helped in comparing the change that came over them at the end of the program. (An outline of the RSIP is found in Appendix A.)

One reason for using the tasks in this program was to help trainees develop their repertoire of strategies. When trainees worked through tasks, they needed to draw upon their inventory of strategies. In fact, tasks themselves forced trainees to use particular strategies. In addition to these purposes, the tasks in this program additionally helped make the users metacognitively aware, an important objective of a teacher development program.

The primary criterion for selection of strategies was dependent on the needs of the participants of this course, as determined by the earlier pilot study. This had established the need for not only a strategy instruction program but also for instruction in the use of certain strategies the participants were found to be lacking, for example, the strategies of inferencing (both at word level and at the text level), skimming, and scanning. Therefore, strategies were chosen was based empirical investigation of the participants' needs. This was supported by my subjective awareness of their needs, based on my familiarity with the context. In addition, metacognition was a thread that ran through the entire program. Typically, the participants chose the reading text, worked through the tasks in pairs/groups. This was followed by a plenary discussion. (A sample reading text and task are found in Appendix B.)

An important procedure followed in this study was that of mental modeling (Pani, 2004), in which I articulated my mental process of completing sample tasks, showing the steps of using the target strategy. The informants then did the same in their groups. Some of these were recorded and served as data for analysis.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis methods were both descriptive and interpretative. Raw data collected from the questionnaire were quantified. Data collected through the other sources, that is, participant diaries, the researcher's journal, informant interviews, and think-aloud protocols were analyzed qualitatively. Recurring patterns of data were identified. These

were further categorized, and the rest of the data were analyzed using these categories, using an inductive approach. The categories were further refined in the process.

The think aloud protocols were analyzed using a set of analytical categories developed during the pilot study. These categories had also emerged from the data and were further refined while being used with other protocols. Validation was conducted by collecting data through multiple methods.

Teacher development is a process-weighted concept, and by definition defies any short-term measurement. However, the study attempted to examine the phenomenon through on-the-way processes that can serve as indicators of long-term development. Based on the literature, the following indicators were used to measure teacher development:

- Willingness on part of the teacher to change, to the extent of bringing about change in his/her beliefs;
- Sensitivity to learners and their individual needs and an awareness of how they as teachers can help their learners;
- Willingness to be autonomous and encourage autonomy in learners;
- Development of reading strategies for reading proficiency;
- Professional competence in being able to think of ways in which reading strategy instruction can be imparted to learners;
- Metacognitive awareness and how it helps in the process of reading; and
- Willingness to attend further programs to assist in continual professional development.

The approach to strategy instruction in this study aimed to promote teacher development, subsuming English proficiency development. The effectiveness of the program was evaluated on the basis of the above indicators of teacher development in the participants. Verifying the sustainability of this program was, however, beyond the scope of this study.

In order to illustrate the development of the teachers through this program, I present a profile of Supriya. This profile traces her development from the beginning to the end of the program. It also indicates how other individuals might benefit from such a program.

Results

The questionnaire, interview, and think-aloud protocol data collected show Supriya's development over time. This section is divided into three parts that trace Supriya's development chronologically. The first part presents data collected early in the study showing Supriya as interested in improving herself, but unaware of her own reading processes and largely an inefficient and ineffective reader. The data collected later and presented as mid-study and later results, show her growing awareness of her own reading processes, increased abilities as a strategic reader, and connections between

what she was learning and how she wanted to teach.

Early Results

Supriya was highly motivated to learn. She had been trying to get into the course at ELTI for some time, but had not been permitted by her superiors. She was willing to work hard and learn new things. She was also vocal and readily admitted that she had a problem with vocabulary and did not do any reading, as indicated in this early interview:

> Researcher: What did you think of the story "Roy's Boys"?
>
> Supriya: Difficult [5].
>
> R: You found it difficult?
>
> S: In short time I can't understand. Not fully but
>
> R: Was it because of time or something else?
>
> S: Not used to reading
>
> R: Well, if you are not used to it, I guess . . .
>
> S: I am not acquainted with words, see mansion, snubbing elders, I have a problem . . . vocabulary. To some extent I don't read but also vocabulary problem.

Supriya, thus, from the beginning, seemed to be aware of her problems and had no reservations about discussing her limitations. She also appeared to be open to new ideas. One of her diary entries reads:

> Today Ma'm told us about affective strategies. I think it is true. Unless one can change its emotion or anxiety how he can cope with society. Sometimes I encourage but not always. I can try this. Make positive statement is not always possible but I will try. It is a good idea.

Supriya was not very consistent in her response to the questionnaire at the beginning of the study. For word-level strategies, she said that she rarely said the words mentally as she read. She did not know how she felt about not knowing the meanings of the words, but she contradicted this by adding that she usually tried to find the accurate meanings of words and paid attention to individual words. Her response to the questionnaire showed a number of other inconsistencies.

In fact, dealing with unknown words was a major problem with the informants, so in an

interview conducted at the beginning of the program, I asked Supriya what she typically did when she encountered difficult words while reading. She said:

> When I go through the newspaper or new story and I feel there is difficult word I repeatedly read the difficult word, see the dictionary and sometimes I ask words even to my children also because sometimes words are unknown to us but may be known to English medium school children or other children. I can ask them and I can know the meaning of the difficult word and I try to understand the passage properly.

Nassaji's (2003) study shows repeating as the strategy most frequently used by intermediate ESL learners in order to infer the meanings of lexical items, but repeating words was not found to be a successful strategy in this study. In fact, Nassaji (2003) calls this a "nonstrategic attempt" (p. 663). Supriya is talking about the same nonstrategic behavior. During this interview, Supriya also referred to her habit of using the dictionary as other instructors did. It was unusual, however, that she mentioned consulting her children, who she felt knew more than she because they studied in English-medium schools. This comment focuses attention on Supriya's willingness to learn from all possible sources.

When I asked her what she did before she read a novel she said:

> S: I look at the author's name because it is important. First I look at the author and then the title then characters

> R: How do you know about the characters?

> S: After reading pages, I know the attitudes. For example, I enjoy the novels of Bibhuti Patnaik.

> R: We were talking about novels in English.

> S: (laughs)

It became apparent that what she was thinking of was reading in her native language; she hardly did any reading in English.

When asked if she ever went back to the beginning of the reading material, she quickly said, "I do not continue with the next paragraph unless I understand this." But what about giving up when she did not understand, I asked her. Like the others in her group, she too was unwilling to admit that there was ever any possibility of giving up, especially since she was a teacher. When asked if she was aware of any thing special she did in order to understand a text, she said that she used "deep thinking."

> S: I give concentration to my reading. If it is a science topic, and I do not

understand a word, I will ask the science teacher.

R: But she may not be around.

S: I will remember the term and ask her.

A good reader to Supriya was:

one who has a lot of practical and he is also interest. So I think he will be good reader if he has interest. I have no interest in science. So I can't read it, Good reader have a lot of interest.

Generally, Supriya was not aware of taking any specific step to understand a difficult text except getting the meanings of the difficult words. This interview revealed and supported the findings from the questionnaire that she read very little in English, something that she had admitted earlier. Therefore, the reading situations presented were actually hypothetical situations for her.

A look at the think-aloud protocol collected before the program, where she was asked to guess the meaning of two unknown words from a short text with a partner showed that Supriya usually repeated parts of the text orally. While she was able to get the overall meaning of the text, she was not able to use this to get the meanings of the words. Even as she came close to the meaning she went off at a tangent. "It's a . . . sense means . . . dissension (means) knowledge but it is dissension (means) their rudeness." Right till the end she went on meandering, giving different interpretations of the word only to finally agree with her partner. This was because she was not able to identify the clues to the meaning in the text. She went through a 'hit and miss' process without taking recourse to any clear cut use of strategies. The task and a part of the protocol is attached as Appendix C.

<u>Mid-Study Results</u>

A study of the protocols collected in the middle of the program however, showed signs of improvement in Supriya. She began by reading the text as a whole before trying to understand what the parts were. Her style of reading was still confined to reading a bit of the text and then paraphrasing. Her background knowledge seemed to interfere with her reading, leading to a distorted meaning of the text at one point. However, she was able to identify the exact source of problem showing some monitoring abilities. This was clear in the following interchange:

R: If fun and pleasure cause happiness then what is the meaning of "but the opposite is true?"

S: (It is the line which I don't understand.)

Later she also said:

> S: I have given more attention to fun filled life and pain free life. But it is the
> opposite. I do understand the opposite but the difficult line is 'more times
> than not'. This line ma'm, here er.. how happiness is involved, I do not know.

Supriya thus was able to identify her problems and did not hesitate to articulate them.

In an interview conducted around the same time, Supriya admitted that before reading
had meant simply finding the meanings of difficult words. She did not know that there
was so much to reading and that there were things one could do if there was a
comprehension problem. She was especially happy to find that background knowledge
of a reader could be used so effectively for reading. In an interview she said:

> S: To me it was just reading, finding the meaning of difficult words. Now I
> know there is so much to reading like inferencing, there are so many
> cognitive strategies. I know what I can do if I fail to understand. I can go
> back to the beginning.
>
> R: You didn't do these earlier?
>
> S: No, I just used to read. If I understood, fine. Otherwise I just gave up. So
> I like it now. I can monitor by asking questions. I have understood like using
> 'when', this will talk of time . . . (referring to using discourse markers as aid
> to understanding).

She was thus able to articulate her awareness of the reading process, the reading
strategies and the change in her. She felt that she was able to read more effectively.

There were other changes in Supriya. She wrote in her diary, "It is not possible to
understand so well with reading aloud as in silent reading." For a teacher in the
secondary school of Orissa, this in itself is a notable change because often reading is
equated with reading aloud. In the first interview, she had said that what was important
to her in reading was pronunciation. Her view had however changed after the strategy
training:

> Reading means getting meaning in whatever way. It may be by skipping
> things . . . that may be done by inferencing, or guessing . . . I can monitor
> my comprehension.

Her problem was still one of completing tasks in the allotted time. This problem was
magnified when the task was difficult. But she liked the course because of the variety of
tasks. She said, "I feel my thinking power is increasing."

Whenever there was a discussion, Supriya related it to her learners in the classroom.

She comments about that the primary use of the course: "If we don't understand ourselves, how can we help our learners?" Thus, even though the program did not directly talk of the learners, she related everything to her own classroom situations. She wrote in her diary, "My interest is developing day by day. When Ma'm is explaining I am thinking I will also do like this - create such habit in my students." When asked in the interview how she was planning to do this, she said:

> I will tell them to try and understand on their own. I will give them clues . . . if they can't find the clues. I will ask them to monitor their comprehension. I will ask them to find the links . . . I also like it when you discuss. I try to think why the meaning is like this . . . it helps me. I would also like to help my learners like this.

The idea that she would promote discussion in her learners suggested a change in her as a teacher. Giving learners opportunities to express their own points of view is uncommon in the teacher-dominated classrooms of the state board schools, where typically the only time the learners speak in class is to answer comprehension questions.

Late Results

The protocols collected later in the program showed further improvement in Supriya. She showed use of cognitive strategies such as prediction, skimming for main idea, and ignoring difficult words, though the most common cognitive strategy still seemed to be reading and paraphrasing. When I intervened in an activity to check her understanding, she was generally able to show her understanding of the text:

> S: that our options are limited . . . options in life are reducing gradually.

> R: Can you give me an example of an option?

> S: Yes, games, sports or piano lesson, things I can't do because of my age.

Supriya showed instances of planning and monitoring. She paused to check her understanding. Thus, she used metacognitive strategies to some extent.

An interview conducted at the end of the program showed that Supriya was even more articulate about ideas about the course and what she had gained as a participant of the RSIP. She was clearly aware of the cognitive strategies, and thought she was able to use some of these effectively.

> R: Which of the strategies do you find most useful?

> S: Inferencing at text level and word level. Looking for clues and getting meaning. But I think they are interlinked. I think I can perform well when I

make use of more than one strategy.

R: What about planning and monitoring?

S: I think monitoring is very useful because of help in reading and understanding. Then self evaluation to see how well we have understood this, I have never done in my life. But now I find it useful. I can do it.

She admitted that she was still in the process of learning. "I used to stop at every new word . . . I still sometimes do but I tell myself not to do it . . . " She was excited about being able to guess the meaning of unknown words given in mini-contexts with the help of contextual clues. She was able to see the rationale behind the program. She stated that she had expected that the teaching of theory would follow the practice tasks they were doing. But gradually, she realized that theory was built into the tasks. She said, "We were given what we thought was a glass of milk every day and only later when we became strong we realized that there was medicinal supplement mixed in the milk!"

As an adult learner, Supriya had to become aware before the skill to be strategic. But she was able to match this awareness with her strategy gain in the last protocol. In analyzing her own problem, she showed a heightened metacognitive awareness that was lacking earlier. In her diary, she mentioned that reading was no longer equal to pronouncing the individual words. In fact, she believed that reading was a process in which meaning was the most important thing.

In one of the entries in my journal Supriya is called:

. . . a daring lady indeed! Well, I didn't expect this. She was the only one who said if we give learners time to practice we won't be able to complete the course. 'Complete the course', what does she mean? But this lady is daring enough to say what she believes to be true and I appreciate that. After she said that others came forward to agree with her.

Supriya's outspokenness in a context where teachers are usually timid in disagreeing with the tutor is unusual. Having watched my modeling of the process of guessing the meaning of a word through contextual clues carefully, Supriya came to the conclusion that I was able to see the connections in the text far more quickly than she could. She said that my 'aha!!' point could not be hers. On the whole, it was this openness and willingness to learn that helped in making her a more strategic reader and a more informed reading teacher.

Discussion

An analysis of data from different sources showed an improvement in Supriya's use of reading strategies as well as her development as a teacher of reading. Some of this can be attributed to a few special features of RSIP which are listed below:

- The program consisted of a series of tasks to give Supriya and the other participants training in developing reading strategies. This developed her interest and the hands on experience helped her to see the utility of the program. The relevance of tasks in second language classrooms (Brown, 1991; Foley, 1991; Nunan ,1989; Prabhu, 1987) also holds true for LTE programs. While task-based training programs may not be uncommon in large parts of the world, in the Indian context it is unusual because most training colleges still give lectures and follow the chalk-and-talk method even today.
- Supriya and the participants had autonomy in deciding which strategy they wanted to practice and the tasks they wished to do. Learner autonomy is not a luxury (Hagan, 1994; Kumarvadivelu, 1994), but is imperative for learning. This is also true of the LTE context. By making provision for such autonomy, the program facilitated learning. However, such autonomous decisions had to be based on general consensus, as practical considerations did not permit complete autonomy.
- The use of mental modeling made the reading process of the tutor explicit for the participants. The tutor demonstrated her own use of reading strategies while trying to complete a task by thinking aloud before the participants. This helped in demystifying the reading process as Supriya and the others were able to get a glimpse into the mind of the tutor (Pani 2004). Another advantage of mental modeling was that the steps for using reading strategies were made explicit to them.
- Unlike the typical whole-class mode, which gave opportunity to very few confident participants to articulate their ideas, the use of pair work and group work, followed by whole class discussion, enhanced involvement and participation. Again, procedures such as pair work and group work, which are routinely used elsewhere, are still uncommon in most Indian teacher education contexts.
- The fact that I was non-judgmental about the participants' interpretations of the texts (provided these were supported by textual clues and appropriate background knowledge) helped Supriya and the others to present their points of view with minimum inhibition. A non-threatening atmosphere in which students functioned helped them be motivated and remain involved with the tasks they were assigned to do. ("When you taught us, I observed your patience. No matter how worthless the questions were you attended to them. Now I want to do it," Supriya said.) Traditionally, teacher education classrooms in India have been teacher-centered with the teacher educator occupying center stage. However, humanistic approaches have focused on the importance of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the learner (Williams & Burden 1997). The trainee-centered approach of this program where, like others, Supriya was more central to the program than the tutor gave her a sense of power that assisted in her learning.

To answer the research questions raised at the beginning of the study, Supriya, like the other informants, seemed to accept the program. She showed interest and excitement in

selecting the tasks and in trying to complete the tasks; she was generally unaware of the fact that she was working beyond the allotted class time. My apprehension that Supriya might have found a proficiency-oriented program unacceptable because she was a teacher was unfounded.

The second question, regarding the use of reading strategies, is answered to some extent. Supriya showed a heightened awareness of reading strategies, as seen through the interview conducted at the end of the program. This was supported by comparing her responses to the questionnaire administered at the beginning and end of the program. Admittedly, the responses to the interview and questionnaire showed her awareness of strategies, but do not necessarily imply that she has proceduralized them. But this awareness has come before use for Supriya, an adult learner. The think-aloud protocols used to collect data during reading tasks show her using some reading strategies, such as reading the text as a whole, trying to look for clues to draw inferences, skimming quickly through the text before attempting the task, and ignoring some difficult words; and metacognitive strategies like consciously monitoring her comprehension. The program appears to have helped Supriya develop her reading strategies.

The answer to the final question, regarding the program's influence on her development as a reading teacher, was positive. Her perception of the reading process changed. Reading was no longer a process of articulating words, but a search for meaning. In spite of being a teacher in a context where learners are seen as receivers of knowledge, she readily agreed to give the responsibility of extracting meaning from the text to the learners. Though learner training was not a part of this program, she consciously related her own experience as a learner to her learners. She thought of ways in which she could help her students to read strategically. The awareness of the reading process and some visible signs of strategy gain seems to have given her enough confidence and encouragement for further development. She, like the others, showed a strong desire to remain closely related to the ELTI for further developmental programs.

Final Note

In reporting this study, I have drawn on my experience both as a teacher and a researcher, reflecting Freeman's (1996) claim that "You have to know the story in order to tell the story" (p. 89). I know Supriya's story well as I was an intimate part of the story and I have told it the way I could.

Notes

[1] In India, there are two kinds of schools according to the medium of instruction--the English medium schools and the State Board schools, where English is only one subject in a fuller curriculum.

[2] This is a pseudonym.

[3] Key books are the books illegally available in the market where the texts are explained in the native language and answers to the questions are worked out. Students who use these are said to follow the "key book culture."

[4] This is available from the researcher.

[5] The actual expressions used by Supriya have been used all through this report, which originally were in a mixed code. The translations are kept as close to the original as possible.

About the Author

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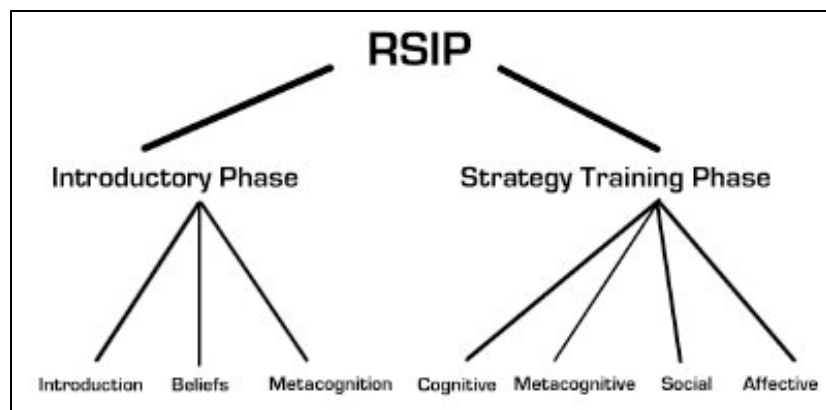
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Appendix A

Design of the Reading Strategy Instruction Program (RSIP)

Appendix B

A sample task from RSIP

Read the following passage and fill in the blank spaces with suitable words. Why did

you choose these words? Explain to your partner.

Grandfather's Ride Home

Mrs. Brown's old grandfather lives with her. Every morning he goes for a walk in the park. He comes home at noon to have his lunch. One morning a police car stopped outside 1. _____ Brown's house at 12.00 and two 2. ---------------- helped the man to the house.3. ---------- of the policeman said to Mrs. Brown, "The poor 4. ---------------- gentleman lost his way in the 5. ----------- and telephoned the police station for help, so they 6. ---------------- us to bring him home. Mrs. Brown was very 7. ------------------ but thanked the policemen and they left. "But 8. ----------------------, " she said, " you have been to that 9. -------------- nearly everyday for the last twenty years. How 10. ------------ - you got lost there?" The old 11. ------------ smiled, winked and said, " I didn't exactly lose my way. I just got tired and didn't want to 12. -------------- home."   (Clarke 1980:207)

Appendix C

Sample task with paired think aloud protocol

Read the following passage and guess the meanings of the underlined words:

At the beginning of the 19th century, some of the Zulu clan were ruled by a king called Chaka. He was a clever military leader with insatiable political ambition. He won most of the South Eastern Africa and united all the Zulu clan into one great empire, the Zulu nation. Soon afterwards however, the downfall of the Zulu empire started by dissension among the blacks themselves, and ended in conflict with the whites. (Haastrup 1987)

Transcript lines: (S is Supriya and M is her partner. The parts of the transcript in square brackets are in the mother tongue of the speaker. A xxx sequence indicates an inaudible portion of the recording.)

S: hm . . . conflict or a . . . xxx among themselves the . . . started by dissension among the blacks themselves... and ended in conflict with the whites this means the conflict . . . the a... em... battle um. em . . . started among themselves among themselves (though) black people and it . . . it is between the white and black people . . . I thought like that and conflict with the blacks ended in conflict with the whites.. they created a em . . . em . . . the battle among themselves and end with the white em.. [white people means]

M: Both have started conflict

S: Both have started the conflict. They are a em a [they fought among themselves and].. [they also fought with the whites] this here understand that there are two types of clans and they fight among themselves and then with the whites . . .

M: Dissension.. it is a type of.. rudeness

S: 'It's a . . . . sense means (long pause) dissension [means] knowledge but it is dissension [means] their rudeness'.

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