

Improving Eleventh Graders' Reading Comprehension Through Text Coding and Double Entry Organizer Reading Strategies

Mejoramiento de la comprensión lectora de estudiantes de grado once mediante las estrategias de lectura de codificación de texto y organizador de doble entrada

Rocío Mahecha*

StellaUrrego**

Erika Lozano***

Policarpa Salavarieta School, Colombia

In this article we report on an innovation project developed with a group of eleventh graders at a public school in Bogotá. Its aim was to encourage students to improve reading comprehension of texts in English. It was conducted taking into account students' needs, interests and level of English. To do it, we implemented two reading strategies: text coding and double entry organizer. We observed the students' attitudes during two lesson plans, compared their level of comprehension before and after using the reading strategies and asked them to self-evaluate their performance. At the end, we could see their improvement, how they enjoyed doing the activities and became more confident.

Key words: Double entry organizers, reading comprehension, reading strategies, text coding.

En este artículo reportamos un proyecto de innovación desarrollado con un grupo de estudiantes de grado once de un colegio distrital de Bogotá. El propósito era animar a los estudiantes a mejorar su comprensión de textos en inglés. Para ello se tuvieron en cuenta sus necesidades, intereses y nivel de inglés. Se utilizaron dos estrategias de lectura: codificación de texto y organizador de doble entrada. Observamos la actitud de los estudiantes durante el desarrollo de dos lecciones, comparamos sus niveles de comprensión de lectura antes y después de utilizar las dos estrategias y les pedimos autoevaluar su desempeño. Al final pudimos apreciar mejoría en los niveles de comprensión, el disfrute en la realización de las actividades y la seguridad que alcanzaron.

Palabras clave: comprensión de lectura, codificación de textos, estrategias de lectura, organizadores gráficos de doble entrada.

This paper reports on a study conducted by the authors while participating in the PROFILE Teacher Development Program at Universidad Nacional de Colombia in 2009-2010. The program was sponsored by Secretaría de Educación de Bogotá, D.C. Code number: 1576, August 24, 2009.

* E-mail: rossymas@yahoo.com

** E-mail: marimarsol60@hotmail.com

*** E-mail: erlomed@hotmail.com

This article was received on January 29, 2011, and accepted on July 31, 2011.

Introduction

Although most of the students at the Policarpa Salavarrieta school liked their English class, they had problems when reading texts and trying to answer comprehension questions. This was evident not only in class but also when they took different examinations in which the main component was reading. We examined the low scores obtained by the eleventh grade students on the ICFES exam¹, English section, in the last three years, diagnosed the students' likes, preferences and troubles at the moment of reading, and decided to plan a project.

The innovation consisted of guiding the students in the use of two reading strategies: *text coding* and *double entry organizer*. That is, to come to understand a text following a planned process of reading that goes from the top-down skills to the bottom-up skills. In general, this innovation project sought to motivate the students not only towards reading but also towards English as a school subject in general by improving their levels of comprehension and, hopefully, getting better results on the ICFES test. In the long run, we expect students to feel comfortable in their future careers or jobs because they have the domain to understand texts in English and, consequently, be successful.

After planning the lessons, which included two workshops, we decided to compare the comprehension students had before applying the two strategies and after doing it. Data was gathered through teacher's observation notes, the students' answers in the workshops and the self evaluation of their performance.

This article includes the objectives, the literature reviewed about reading comprehension and reading strategies, and the analysis of the categories

found during the development of the project together with the positive and negative aspects. The last section includes the conclusions about the improvement in students' reading comprehension of texts in English and our suggestion as regards the necessity to keep working with the reading strategies and take advantage of the achievements of this innovation project with all the high school students in the institution.

Objectives

To guide the 11th grade students at the Policarpa Salavarrieta School, morning shift, to read short passages by means of text coding and double entry organizer reading strategies.

To examine the effect of text coding and double entry organizer reading strategies on the students' comprehension level.

Context

The group of students chosen for implementing the project was in the 1102 group at the Policarpa Salavarrieta School. This is an official school located in Bogotá, Colombia. There were seventeen girls and sixteen boys whose average age was 17. Most of them belonged to the lower middle socioeconomic level. According to the Common European Framework, their level of English was A1; that is, knowledge of some words related to their immediate context and some short sentences. It seemed that most of them liked the English class and enjoyed it, but they lacked good reading habits. That is, they knew a limited amount of words, their comprehension of texts was very low or minimal and they had not been motivated towards the learning of English.

Literature Review

In order to develop the process of application of the two reading strategies mentioned above,

¹ ICFES: The Colombian examination for admission to university studies. It is applied to 11th grade students from all the Colombian schools as a requirement to get the high school diploma.

different texts and authors were taken into account to clarify some aspects. The concept of reading comprehension, associated factors with reading, criteria for choosing the kind of text in the two workshops, theory about specific strategies and why to use an image as a complementary element to the text, were studied.

To begin, according to Aebersold and Field (1997), reading

Is what happens when people look at a text and assign meaning to the written symbols in that text. The text and the reader are the two physical entities necessary for the reading process to begin. It is, however, the interaction between the text and the reader that constitutes actual reading (p. 15)

As a process, reading implies stages, steps and attitudes because it is an active process between the subject and the object. That is, between the reader and the reading. Nevertheless, more important than this relation is the interaction between both of them (Rumelhart, 1977, in Aebersold & Field, 1997). For instance, the reader as an active element thinks about the themes of the text; then, he/she has many experiences, a wide or narrow background knowledge that influences the comprehension level. Hence, the reader establishes relations with his/her context through the text. These relations can be intra, extra or inter textual.

In this respect, Urrego (2007) expresses that communicative competence is composed of pragmatic and the linguistic competences and their interrelation. However, the author explains that different factors of pragmatic competence determine the linguistic one. We speak, read and write according to our thoughts, experiences, ideologies and social environment in the world. In other words, we have a formal verbal expression supported in the way we think. In the same way, linguistic competence includes socio-cultural factors. The role of these factors involved in reading,

books, influence of the family, reading in the school, libraries, photocopies and the reader's socio-economic situation confirm that the reader is an active subject in reading.

Outside factors connected to reading comprehension such as time of classes, timetable, number of students per class, individual and collective cultural level, personal likes and tendencies in reading, resources provided by the school, the teacher's attitude and the general environment determine the progress or slowdown in the process of reading. However, "personality factors are more significant than socio-cultural variables and educational background for learning strategy preferences" (Nunan, 1991, p. 170).

These individual factors that influence learning, self-esteem, inhibition, risk taking, anxiety, and motivation also influence reading. Aebersold & Field point out, too, that "Home, community, school, culture, and individual characteristics all shape the life experiences that readers bring to reading. They help form the complex persona of reader and form the basis for understanding the reading process" (1997, p. 8). All this background information they bring when reading is the schema. Another important aspect concerning this matter, and mentioned by the same author, is that their success in understanding a given text is affected by the way they learned to read.

From what has been said so far, we can note that key constituents make reading possible. "The reading comprehension process focuses on three elements: The text being read, the background knowledge possessed by the reader, and contextual aspects" (Alderson & Urguhart, 1984, in Calderón Agudelo, Carvajal Ávila, & Guerrero López, 2007, p. 28).

It was also important to consider the relationship between Spanish (L1) and English (L2). When studying this relation and communicative

competence, it is necessary to say that in L2 the thought and, to a certain extent, the reader's ideology seems to be trapped by linguistic competence due to the lack of vocabulary and fluency that generates some frustration (Urrego, 2007). In other words, comprehension is affected by schematic knowledge structures in the sense that these can facilitate or inhibit it when they are over or underutilized (Aslanian study, 1985, cited by Nunan, 1991).

Now, in the selection of the kind of texts to be used in the workshops, it was necessary to consider the purposes. These are the purpose of the text, the purpose of teaching and the purpose of learning. The first one refers to the writer's purpose, which is to give information, to give his opinion about the text, to persuade. The second, the teacher's purpose, could be to teach grammar, expressions, improve the students' specific skills. The last one is the student's purpose; that is to say, what the student wants to learn consciously or unconsciously. On the part of the student, it is very worthy to take into account the purpose of reading. It could be reading for pleasure and reading for information (Grellet, 1981), but in this specific case, we pretended that our students read for pleasure as a first step to get them motivated towards this practice and make them feel more confident in the process.

Just as important as identifying the purpose of reading was to select the kind of text and the topic of it in order to follow an integral process of reading comprehension. Both are determined by the meaning they have for the students. The criteria to select a text are: 1) Length: Working with a short text seems to guarantee an improvement in the process of reading comprehension. 2) Conciseness: Words. That is, words have essential content that permit analyzing specific terms, learning new expressions, identifying key words and main ideas. 3) Relation of text-image: This must not only be an illustrative element, but a motivator and, sometimes, indicator

of the topic, especially when it appears at the beginning of a text. 4) Relation of reader's interest and theme: The kind of theme must touch the reader and be of his/her interests. In the same sense, Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes affirm that

After students are both comfortable and relatively articulated in expressing the messages of shorter readings such as ads, short articles about familiar, even sensational topics, and interviews, they are prepared to read longer texts on the basis of special interests or to engage in 'pleasure reading' as an outside activity (1991, p. 200).

This has also been evidenced in other studies carried out in public schools in Bogotá. In this respect, Quiroga Carrillo stresses that in the search of a topic, it is also necessary to have in mind that "the topics of the texts have an impact on students' motivation" (2010, p. 20).

Besides the aspects mentioned so far, what matters most in this project is the explanation of two reading strategies to be used with the students in the lessons planned. The strategies are *text coding* and *double entry organizer*. The former refers to the action of assigning colors, stickers or any code to the text in order to find out the relations established in it (grammatical categories or main ideas). This strategy is motivational for students to the point they get engaged or involved in the reading process. They also read and interact meaningfully with the material by coding it (TeacherVision, 2010). The latter is a two-column device to write information about the text (pre-knowledge or reflections). According to Gil-García and Villegas (2003, cited in Echeverry & McNulty, 2010, p. 109), graphic organizers "have been linked to the development of higher thinking skills for reading comprehension".

Some benefits of these reading strategies are the ability the students gain to organize ideas and establish relationships, to recover explicit information in a text, to deduce implicit information in it,

to identify new vocabulary and main ideas, and to relate the text to the context, among others. Graphic organizers, for instance, help “students recall and display information, and show relationships in content” (Ben-David, 2002, in Echeverry & MacNulty, 2010, p. 109).

Finally, we should mention that we considered the selection of a text with an image. We did so because, although not all the texts include images that illustrate the content, they are very important keys to help the readers grasp the general idea of a text (Wright, 1989).

As mentioned above, reading is more than decoding letters and words; it goes beyond. Therefore, it is necessary to keep in mind a wide sense of what reading is. All the time we “read” colours, grimaces and all kinds of symbols. So, the role of the image in the present world, even nowadays when the mass media and technology have a notable influence on the new generations, has helped readers become conscious of another text to be read and another way of reading. Sometimes there is more information for readers in one image than in many words. It is true that “a picture is worth a thousand words” because the image is another *text*.

Pedagogical Design

The innovation project reported here is framed into the Meaningful Learning Approach since both the criteria and the characteristics of the project are in agreement with this approach. That is, the topics selected for developing the workshops are relevant for the students. Meaningful learning also includes the selection of materials in an objective and intentional way (Ausubel, 1983). For this reason, the texts for the workshops were selected following the students' likes expressed in the diagnostic survey (see Appendix A).

Another aspect taken into account was their background as a starting point to increase the

knowledge of the foreign language, vocabulary and structures. Moreover, the two strategies applied in this approach let them establish relationships between different cognitive structures. For instance, the interaction among words semantically connected, grammatical categories and the topic and/or main ideas the students reached. This aspect makes a difference in the traditional learning by repetition.

As already said, the innovation or change project arises from the observation of low scores on the ICFES exam during the last three years at the Policarpa Salavarrieta School. This situation may have been the result of the way reading is dealt with in the eleventh grade English class (as an exercise to solve vocabulary and grammar problems without following a specific objective). Most of the time there has not been a planned sequence to develop the reading activities in the classroom. For those reasons, our work aimed to apply a new resource in the English class, specifically in reading. According to Rogers (2005, p. 11, cited in Kirklan & Sutch, 2009, p. 10), “innovation is the *application* of a new resource or approach that changes social practice, creating some value [...] by altering the social practice of teaching and learning [...] If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation”.

As Rudduck states, innovation “is conscious, planned, and involves some fundamental breaks with the known past” (1991, p. 56). It was conscious because it was thought to help a group of students improve their levels of comprehension of short texts in English and give them the confidence to get higher scores on reading tests. It was designed to be developed in two workshops in two lesson plans before the ICFES test and change the handling of tests.

Innovation implies gathering information about innovation, in this case about reading comprehension, reading strategies, reading as a process,

the two specific reading strategies, personality and socio-cultural factors, among others. It also involves making a decision on its usefulness and on the adoption or rejection of the innovation. Finally, the innovators decide to confirm or refute the decisions made earlier (Markee, 1997). Therefore, it is necessary to introduce some changes in the classroom to talk about innovation since “changing old habits of thought and observation” is a crucial stage in the task of introducing innovation” (Rudduck, 1991, p. 67).

Procedure

This project was carried out with a group of thirty-three students (though at the moment of implementing it some were not attending lessons) from the 1102 grade at the Policarpa Salavarrieta School. First, a diagnostic survey was applied to the group (See Appendix A) as the starting point of the project. It aimed to identify their attitudes toward reading and their preferences with respect to kinds of texts and topics. Based on the results of this survey, the topics for the readings to be part of the workshops were chosen. In Appendix B we include a sample containing the second text, and the corresponding lesson plan in Appendix C. Simultaneous with the application of the workshops, class observation took place.

To develop the project we decided to work as a team with clearly defined tasks. Together, we discussed the literature review, the topics of the readings, the instruments for gathering and analyzing data. One of the teachers taught the lessons and the other two were the observers; one focused on the students’ attitudes and performance, and the other on the teacher. In order to observe how we could help students improve their level of reading comprehension, four different data sources were selected. One was the identification of students’ percentage of comprehension before and

after implementing the two reading strategies. To do so, we asked them: *How much did you understand before and after explaining and applying the text coding and double entry organizers strategies?* They were requested to indicate, individually and in terms of percentage, how much they had understood the first time they read the texts and how much after applying the two reading strategies.

As the second kind of data collection technique, students were asked to self-evaluate their perceived feelings and performance during the workshops by answering two questions: *How did you feel before the reading comprehension activity?* and *What level of comprehension did you have in the process?* Here they could express their acceptance of the exercises, their attitudes towards reading and towards the topics of the passages.

As has been mentioned, the third source for data gathering was class observation by two members of the team. It aimed at observing the students’ attitudes, performance and progress in reading comprehension through the application of the two reading strategies and to identify positive aspects and difficulties during the process. As a final source to analyze, we considered the teacher’s notes. Although these notes are brief, they helped us support information concerning students’ behaviors and achievements, as well the observers’ records.

Results

In connection with the objectives stated at the beginning of the project, the findings were organized into three categories or big themes: Previous stage, Guided process and Main Achievements (see Figure 1). The first one refers to the base-line stage or diagnosis described before, which let us uncover the students’ attitude towards reading texts in English, the aspects that make understanding difficult as well as their preferences regarding the topic of those texts. The second

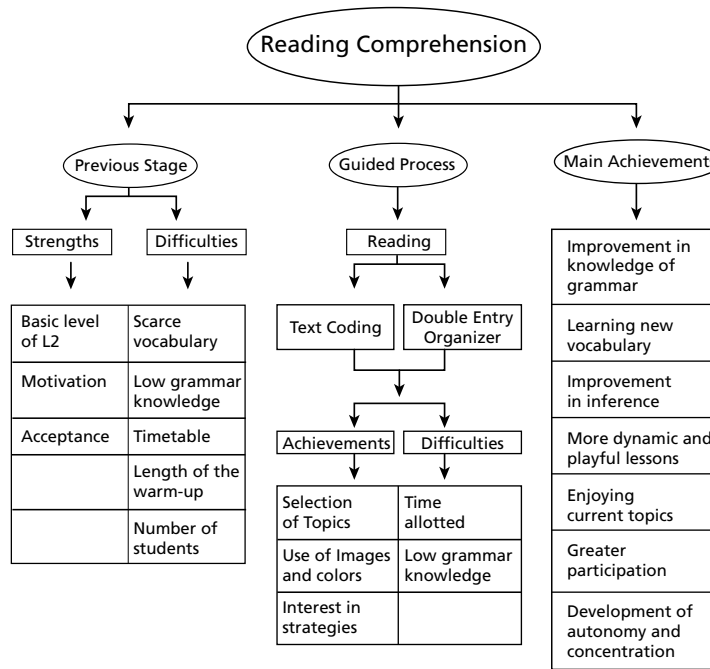


Figure 1. Categories Showing the Results of the Innovation

category deals with the process of implementation of the two reading strategies in order to help them improve their level of reading comprehension. The last one has to do with the results of the innovation as observed in the students' performance.

Previous Stage

This category was defined in order to show the strengths, as well as the difficulties the group of students possessed before the innovation. Both were affecting their reading comprehension level. One of the strengths is the basic level of English students apparently had before starting the first workshop. We say strength because in some ways they were not new learners of the L2, and that scarce knowledge was an opportunity for us to guide them to a higher level. Hence, their perception of this progress served as a motivator. As stressed by Zabala Palacio (2004), who did a study with adolescent students in a public school in Bogotá

We should bear in mind that the importance given to the students' previous knowledge and to the English reading skills is an essential part in the learning process of a foreign language as it constitutes an important support for the development of reading competences in English (p. 106).

Moreover, during the warm-up they mentioned some words related to the topic chosen for the workshop following the diagnostic survey. Then, applying the strategy of text coding, they assigned a color to those known words. It was strength because it helped them understand, because it was meaningful and eased the reading process. These are some examples of the students' answers²:

I identified some words. (Student 1)

I understood a little, but it was difficult for me. (Student 2)

² Taken from the students' self-evaluation of the activity, included in the lesson plans and translated into English by the authors.

This could be seen in the students' perceived percentage of comprehension before applying the two reading strategies (see Figure 2, containing an overview of what was found in the whole class). Besides known words, they identified transparent words and followed the teacher's instructions given in English.

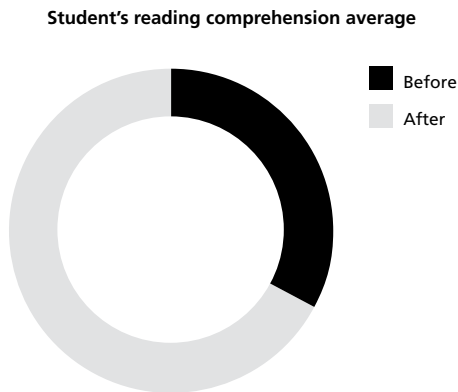


Figure 2. Overview of the Class' Level of Understanding before and after Applying the Two Reading Strategies

Another of the strengths was the students' motivation towards the method proposed in order to help them improve their level of comprehension. It represented a change in the way the process of reading had been addressed, using colors to identify key words. When they saw the map of colors in their text indicating the vocabulary, the grammar categories, and the relationships among those words, they deduced topics and stated main ideas in the table. Moreover, after tabulating the students' perceived percentage of reading comprehension that they had before applying the two strategies, it was evident that the majority had a low level (see Figure 3). This was due to the fact that a representative number of students identified a few words, but no complete grammar structures. It seems to be a characteristic in most Colombian public schools, as observed by other

teachers: "Difficulties comprehending texts in English have been observed for quite some time. These difficulties include lack of vocabulary and structures" (Correales, Mendivelso, & Santacruz, 2000, p. 38).

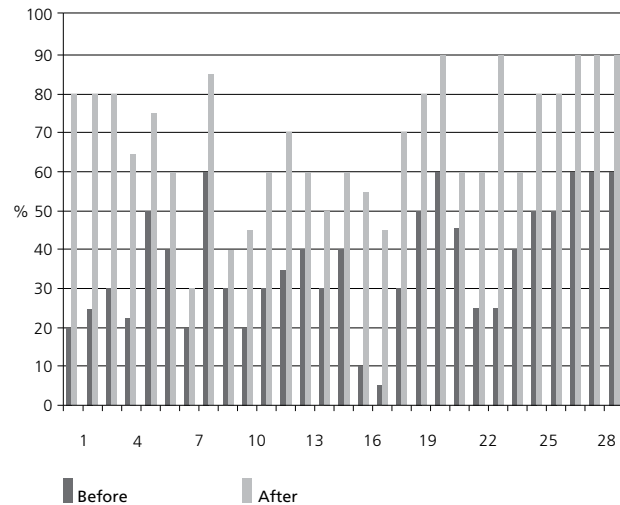


Figure 3. Students' Perceived Percentage of Comprehension before and after Applying the Two Reading Strategies

These two aspects increased the level of difficulty and affected their performance in the exercise. For instance, those students who best knew the grammar structures of Spanish could identify the categories in English –verbs, adjectives, nouns, adverbs– faster than the others. In consequence, a very low number of them could do a meaningful reading or a comprehensive reading by identifying topics, and the relationships among words to state definitions, descriptions, explanations and main ideas. Thus, it could be said a few were touched by the text.

Connected to students' motivation was their willingness to accept the teacher's guidance to develop the workshops according to her instructions. From the very beginning of the project they were aware of the need to improve their level of comprehension of texts in English starting by the

knowledge they had. Also, the effect of this on their future performance was another key aspect. Finally, they were also happy with being part of a project.

Despite what has been said in connection to students' strengths along the reading processes, there were some difficulties that seemed to affect the students' level of reading comprehension. These were the lack of a wide vocabulary background as well as their scarce knowledge of the English grammar structures that appeared to be the same they presented in their mother tongue. In this respect we could perceive that their knowledge of Spanish grammar was very poor and could have affected their comprehension of English grammar.

These two aspects increased the level of difficulty and affected the students' performance in the exercise by making the process go slow. For instance, those students who best knew the grammar structures of Spanish could identify the grammar categories in English faster than the others, as evidenced in the following testimonies:

When I started reading there were so many words I did not know.
(Student 3)

I didn't understand quite much, but there were phrases I could translate and got only a little bit about skaters. (Student 4)

Besides the students' inherent difficulties, there are some others related to the circumstances as the teacher observer stated: the circumstances in which the class took place. For instance, the time when the class was developed –the last two sections of a specific Wednesday morning after the physical education class and the break. These conditions made the students arrive late. Other factors that had an impact on the process of reading comprehension of texts in English were the big number of students in the class (33), the short time for the warm-up, and the length of the text in the second workshop. All these circumstances also affected the development of the innovation and did

not allow students to finish the lesson according to the plan or in the time scheduled.

Guided Process

This category refers to the implementation of the two reading strategies chosen in the project. They were *text coding* and *double entry organizer*. In the former, the students were instructed to identify the known and unknown words in the texts and mark them with two different colors. This action included the cognates. Then, they had to mark the grammar categories with different colors. For instance, verbs in blue, nouns in green, and so on. When they got familiarized with the exercise, most of them rejoiced, as can be read in the testimonies presented afterwards in the *Main Achievements* section.

In a table drawn after the comprehension questions (see Appendix B), the students had to write the unknown words and assign them the meaning according to the context or their experience. After that, they were instructed to draw connections among those words in order to establish the topics and write them in the corresponding row. Here it is worth mentioning the support given by the illustration found at the beginning of the text used in the second workshop (see Appendix B). After having the topics and the questions answered, they read the text again and could state the main idea in the double entry organizer table. Most students admitted: "Now I understand more" (Student 5).

Along the process we observed that most of the students were captivated by the playful activity. They enjoyed it and could identify not only vocabulary or grammatical categories, but topics, functions and, at the end, the main idea of the text. On the contrary, the difficulties were evident in the case of those students who were late for class or had no colors. However, they enrolled in the process.

Another positive element was the selection of the topics for the workshops based on the diagnostic survey applied to the students as the starting point. It resulted in a very useful aspect for the innovation processes. Thanks to this, it was possible to identify their preferences regarding the topics –hobbies, sports and animals– together with the use of illustrations and colors for the codification activity. Moreover, it is possible to say that these aspects brought as a consequence the students' interests in the two reading strategies and their implementation. This was evidenced by the positive attitude towards the methodology used in the process and the commitment shown by the majority of them during the development of the workshops. As one of the observer teachers noted: "For instance, in spite of most of the students having arrived late to the classes and chatting, after the teacher explained what the activity consisted of, they showed surprise and enjoyment. At the end, the majority was doing the exercise and just a few were cheating". Some expressed their pleasure with the activity: "Teacher, I understood" (Student 6).

Regarding the answers on the tests of the workshops after having implemented the reading strategies, it was noted that the students' level of reading comprehension improved greatly. First, they had to read the text and choose the correct answer without any help, neither the teacher's nor a dictionary's. After explaining and applying the two reading strategies, the students read the text again and selected the answers. In most cases these were different and right. We noticed that the second time they developed the workshops, applying the two reading strategies, they changed most of the answers they had given before the implementation. These, in turn, let us compare and draw conclusions.

Nevertheless, there were two relevant problems: on the one hand, the handling of time for each section of the class and the time of the class

in the weekly schedule –three hours per week–, which made it too difficult to cope with the lesson plan stages. On the other hand, the length of the second text provoked a break in the lesson plan development because the workshop could not be finished in only one section. The time dedicated to the warm-up was too long, so the reading process could not be finished in the same class. This consisted of having the students answer the comprehension questions before applying the two strategies and comparing the results with the ones after applying them. We spent a long period of the lesson in the first part of the workshops and the time left to develop the post reading stage and the feedback was insufficient. The wrong handling of time also interrupted the observation process of the last stage of comprehension, which was intended to allow students to identify implicit information, comprehend the structure of the text, start their production process, and develop their "argumentation skills" (Zabala Palacio, 2004).

Main Achievements

With respect to the main achievements observed while applying the two reading strategies, it is very likely that the students' basic level of English eased the recognition of some specific terms. The students' improvement in the level of reading comprehension was evident, first, through the use of colors that led them to the identification of related vocabulary, grammar categories, and the finding of relations among them which, in the end, allowed students to state their topics. These also may have helped them grasp the main ideas and it is very probable that the success in the answering of comprehension questions, by most of them, would have been affected by the accomplishment of these steps.

At this point, it is certain that a majority of students showed positive feelings regarding the methodology that they found playful and dynamic

since it gave them the opportunity to participate actively in the tasks. As Zabala Palacio (2004) states, a systematic methodology promotes the application of reading strategies and motivates students to read texts. This could be seen in some of their answers:

At the end I understood the reading better, I learnt new words.
(Student 7)

I felt I had learnt more about the language (Student 8).

The comprehension of the text was a little bit better thanks to the vocabulary learnt along the process (Student 9).

I liked the exercise because the topic is modern and the dynamic of the class was excellent (Student 10).

I liked the workshop. It was a very playful activity (Student 11).

In this activity I learnt vocabulary, grammar. Besides, I clarify the topic of the last class with respect to pronouns, adjectives, verbs, among others. We worked as a team when answering the questions. At the end we classified the main ideas. We learnt the difference between main idea and topic of a Reading (Student 12).

Revising these comments together with the students' answers in the workshops after applying the two strategies, we could infer that the expected results were reached since the students showed a highly increased level of comprehension and enjoyed it. In addition, and according to the teacher's notes, it should be said that students' scant vocabulary constitutes a considerable obstacle to understanding a text. Nevertheless, students' attitude, in most cases, was positive and they seemed to be willing to do the activities.

I think and I am sure I can use this (strategy) as a reading strategy at the ICFES exam and so, to have a good average, but I would like to have more activities because I would like to go to a higher level (Student 12).

The immediate effects of these two reading strategies on the students' level of reading comprehension seemed to be confirmed by their responses to the activities; the results of the reading

comprehension test and the information obtained as a result of their self-evaluation. Figure 4 shows the students' self-evaluation at the end of the second workshop and reflects progress in their level of understanding.

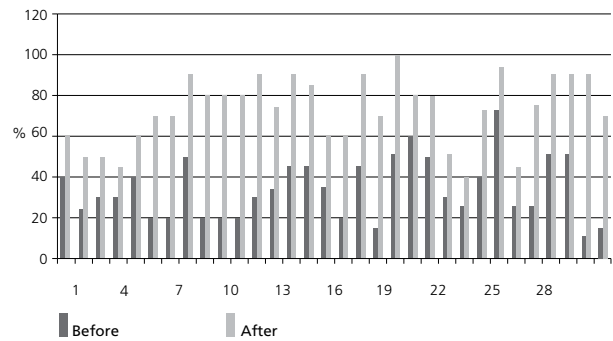


Figure 4. Students' Self-Evaluation after the Second Workshop

The teacher's application of the two strategies and the writing of some key words on the board were useful. Students neither used the dictionary nor asked her for the meaning of unknown words. Besides, they were very committed to the activity, as the teacher observers noted. Thus, they appeared to gain more autonomy and concentration along the process.

Autonomy is defined as "an attitude toward learning in which students are prepared to take responsibility for their learning" (Dickinson, 1995 in Ariza, 2008, p. 49). As mentioned above, most of the students showed responsibility and commitment in doing the activity. Furthermore, a big number of them kept on working without the teacher's guidance. In this respect, Ariza adds that autonomy is closely related to motivation. That is, if the students are motivated, they participate actively in their own learning. This was part of what the observer-teachers expressed in their notes.

Concentration in this process had to do with the motivation, performance and results

obtained by the students in the two workshops. The majority was so attentive when understanding the methodology that even those who were late enrolled in the activity too. As they could see the immediate benefits or progress the two reading strategies represented, some started thinking about the ICFES exam results and the university. This idea led us to agree with Calderón Agudelo et al., (2007, p. 33) that “We believe that students can succeed in the academic world if they know how to extract the principal ideas from a text”.

In sum, the general evaluation made by the students showed a higher preference for reading and a change in attitude before their participation in the activity and before the class in general.

Conclusions and Implications

In general terms, it appears that the students understood the purpose of the reading strategies applied, *text coding* and *double entry organizer*. Particularly, the former seems to have helped them recognize vocabulary and grammar structures, while the latter led them to identify topics and main ideas of the texts and the main difference between them. That is, one is a phrase and the other a sentence. Moreover, having in mind the two objectives stated at the beginning of this project, the use of the two reading strategies would appear to be good tools to help students improve their level of comprehension in reading short texts in English. Something to highlight was that the application of these reading strategies enhanced students’ self-esteem and they tended to become more confident readers.

We were optimistic with respect to the possible results of developing this project at our school. These two reading strategies could be used, not only to improve the students’ level or reading comprehension on the ICFES exam and later on at the university, but also to pursue their oral and

written production. Yet, there were some events that interrupted the normal progression of the classes and affected the consistence and coherence of the project. One of them was the time of the class on the timetable; another was the great amount of students in an English class; also, the vocabulary and reading habits that the students had. All these must be taken into account in the design and development of a future project. It is then necessary to consider the time, the length of the texts, the vocabulary –adapted for the students’ level and some other resources– like pictures or photographs. Finally, we hope to implement these two reading strategies from now on and not only with the highest grade students, but also with the lower grades.

Taking into account the results obtained with this innovation, it could be possible that future researches aim to consider two investigation lines such as the use of TICS (Technologies of Information and Communication) in the reading comprehension process and the comparison between the reading process in L1 and L2. Finally, it would also be necessary to reach the last stage related to production of the students’ point of view in which they develop the argumentative competence with an appropriate level of language.

References

- Aebersold, J. A., & Field M. L. (Ed.). (1997). *From reader to reading teacher: Issues and strategies for second language classrooms*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ariza, A. (2008). Unveiling students’ understanding of autonomy: Puzzling out a path to learning beyond the EFL classroom. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers’ Professional Development*, 10, 47-73.
- Ausubel, D. P. (1983). *Psicología educativa: Un punto de vista cognoscitivo*. México: Trillas.
- Calderón Agudelo, S., Carvajal Ávila, L., & Guerrero López, A. (2007). How to improve sixth graders’ reading

- comprehension through the skimming technique. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 8, 25-39.
- Cave, S. (2010). *About.com Guide - A brief history of skateboarding*. Retrieved from: http://skateboard.about.com/cs/boardscience/a/brief_history.htm
- Correales, R., Mendivelso, O., & Santacruz, F. (2000). Reading comprehension: A viable challenge for public school students. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 1, 38-41.
- Echeverry, L. M., & McNulty, M. (2010). Reading strategies to develop higher thinking skills for reading comprehension. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 12(1), 117-132.
- Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing reading skills*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirklan, K., & Sutch, D. (2009). *Overcoming the barriers to educational innovation. A literature review*. Retrieved from: http://www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/lit_reviews/Barriers_to_Innovation_review.pdf
- Markee, N. (1997). *Managing curricular innovation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- TeacherVision. (2010). *Double - Entry Journals*. Retrieved from: <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/writing/letters-and-journals/48536.html>
- Quiroga Carrillo, C. (2010) Promoting tenth graders' reading comprehension. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 12(2), 11-32.
- Rudduck, J. (1991). *Innovation and change. Developing involvement and understanding*. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.
- Swaffar, J. K., Arens, K. M., & Byrnes, H. (1991). *Reading for meaning: An integrated approach to language learning*. New Jersey, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Urrego, S. (2007). Aspectos socioeconómicos de la competencia pragmática que determinan la competencia lingüística. *Insights*, 10, 49-53.
- Wright, A. (1989). *Pictures for language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zabala Palacio, F. O. (2004). Strategies to support high school students' reading comprehension in the English language. *PROFILE, Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 5, 98-109.

About the Authors

Rocío Mahecha, PG in translation, English-Spanish from Universidad del Rosario; BA in languages, Spanish-English from Universidad Nacional de Colombia; full-time teacher of English at the Policarpa Salavarrieta School; part-time teacher at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá campus.

Stella Urrego, PG in educational evaluation from Universidad Santo Tomás; BA in languages Spanish-French from Universidad Nacional de Colombia; full-time teacher of Spanish at Policarpa Salavarrieta School; part-time teacher of Spanish at Universidad Incca de Colombia.

Erika Lozano, BA in languages from Universidad Libre, electronic engineer from Universidad Central, PG in institutional educational projects management (gerencia de proyectos educativos institucionales); coordinator at the Policarpa Salavarrieta School.

Appendix A: Diagnostic Survey and Results Obtained

1. Do you like reading?
Yes: 22
No: 6
2. Do you read short texts in English?
Yes: 22
No: 6
3. Where do you read those texts?
Only in the English class: 22
At home: 2
On the Internet: 5
Another: 8
4. How do you feel doing those readings?
Not anxious: 2
Anxious: 9
A little bit anxious: 11
Too anxious:
Another: 7
5. What do you think the biggest obstacle to understand a text in English is?
Vocabulary: 18
Grammatical structures: 12
Topic:
Another: 1
6. Do you think a guide on reading strategies would help you to answer questions on a reading test?
Yes: 25
No: 0
7. What kind of topics do you prefer when reading in English?
Animals: 17%
Science: 6%
History: 15%
Famous people: 11%
Inventions: 10%
Places: 11%
Sports: 20%
How to do things: 7%
Another: 3%

8. What kind of text do you prefer to read in English?

Biographies: 6

Letters: 9

Essays: 5

Poems: 9

Advertisements: 5

Reviews: 2

Magazine or newspaper articles: 10

Comics, cartoons: 16

Another: 2

- Questions 1 to 6 based on Survey Statistics for Reading Comprehension Tests for ESL/EFL Students and Anxiety (June 14, 2004). Available at: http://www.nelliemuller.com/survey_Results_and_Reflections_on_Reading_Comprehension_Tests_and_Anxiety.htm.
- Question 7 based on Reading surveys. Available at: <http://www.effectiveteachingsolutions.com/readingsurveys.pdf>
- Question 8 based on Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing reading skills*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix B: Workshop No. 2

C.D. Policarpa Salavarrieta

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

I. Read the text below and choose the correct answer.

SKATEBOARDING



A skater is a human being who enjoys riding a skateboard because it is fun. A lot of skaters could be classified as ‘punks’ but this is just a stereotype. True, some skaters wear tight jeans and a pair of emericas, but a lot of them just dress ‘normally’. There are vert skaters and street skaters. Vert skaters skate in halfpipes. Street skaters skate stairs and ledges and such. Street is currently more popular than vert, mainly because it is easier to do. It does not mean that it requires less skill; it means that street requires no ramp, therefore it can be done in more places than vert. Skateboarders are often said to be druggies, but this is simply not true... True skateboarders have no use for drugs. It’s all about landing those tricks! Landing a trick is the ultimate high. Skateboarding is not a fad; it’s a way of life.

It was first started in the 1950s, when California surfers got the idea of trying to surf the streets. No one really knows who made the first board –instead, it seems that several people came up with similar ideas at the same time. In 1963, skateboarding was at a peak of popularity, and companies started holding skateboarding competitions. The style was mostly either downhill slalom or freestyle. This is more like dancing ballet or ice skating with a skateboard.

Since 2000, attention in the media and products like skateboarding video games, children’s skateboards and commercialization have all pulled skateboarding more and more into the mainstream. The benefit of this is that, of course, skaters are more accepted, and the assumption that all skaters are criminals is slowly being torn down. Also, with more money being put into skateboarding, there are more skate parks, better skateboards, and more skateboarding companies to keep innovating and inventing new things. Another benefit is that it is a very individual activity. There is no right or wrong way to skate.

Skateboarding still hasn’t stopped evolving, and skaters are coming up with new tricks all the time. Boards are also continuing to evolve, as companies try to make them lighter and stronger, or try to improve on their performance. Skateboarding has always been about personal discovery and pushing oneself to the limit.

Retrieved and adapted from About.com. Skateboarding. (2010). *A brief history of skateboarding*. Retrieved and adapted from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=skater>

Urban Dictionary. (2010). *Skater*. Retrieved and adapted from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=skater>

1. In line 2, what is a stereotype?
 - a. A skater
 - b. The way skaters dress
 - c. Classifying skaters as 'punks'

2. The best classification of skaters is:
 - a. Punks and druggies
 - b. Stairs and ledges skaters
 - c. Vert and street skaters

3. According to its history, skateboarding is associated with:
 - a. Surfing
 - b. Slalom
 - c. Freestyle

4. The rise of skateboarding is due to:
 - a. The media
 - b. Commercialization of skateboarding products
 - c. Both a and b

5. The following are benefits of skateboarding except:
 - a. Skaters are more accepted nowadays
 - b. Skateboarding has received attention by the government, the media and businesses
 - c. Skateboarding hasn't evolved since 2000

II. Use colors to identify the grammatical categories indicated: nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives.

III. Complete the table below according to the headings.

Unknown words	Meanings according to the context or to your experience
Topics	Information given by the text
Main idea	Given by you after reading the text

Appendix C: Lesson Plan 2

LESSON PLAN 2

Erika Lozano, Stella Urrego, Rocío Mahecha

Subject: English

EFL level: Not real beginners

Topic: Skaters

Grade: Eleventh

Skills: Getting the main idea of a short text about skateboarding.

Learning Strategies:

Cognitive:

- Students identify the grammatical categories (verbs, adjectives, nouns, adverbs) they know. The teacher helps with some of them.
- The teacher explains the difference between topic and main idea.
- Students give examples of topics and how to express main ideas.

Metacognitive:

- Students write down what they think about the activities done and what they learnt (self-evaluation: checking how well one is doing against one's own standards).

Social affective:

- In groups of four, students identify and unscramble some words (grammatical categories) in order to form coherent sentences.
- The teacher helps with correction.

Learning Styles:

Visual:

- Students look at an image and predict the content of a text.

Auditory:

- The teacher gives instructions to the students about the image shown.
- Students describe the image and answer the teacher's questions about the lifestyle of skaters.

Kinesthetic:

- The students are organized in groups of four. Each group receives a set of words to form sentences and paste them on the board.

Content Objectives:

- To recognize grammatical categories (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) in a text.
- To identify topics.
- To identify main ideas and secondary ideas.

Language Objectives:

- To recognize grammatical categories (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) in a text.
- To develop vocabulary related to skaters.

Materials:

Photocopies of the text about skateboarding, web images of skaters, board and markers, a poster, colors. Copies of the double entry organizer reading strategy samples.

Grammar Points:

Grammatical categories (verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives)

Verb to Be

Verb to wear

Pronouns

Nouns

Adjectives (colors)

Procedure:

Preparation 1: The teacher asks students: "What sports do you practice in your free time?"

The students talk about the characteristics of skating.

Presentation 1: The students read the text the teacher hands out and answer the multiple choice questions neither looking in the dictionary for the meaning of unknown words nor asking the teacher.

Preparation 2: The teacher shows a picture of a boy on a skateboard and asks the students to describe skaters' clothes and general characteristics.

Presentation 2: The teacher asks students to identify nouns and color them in the text. Then, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and finally color each grammatical category.

- The teacher hands out a copy of the double entry organizers to the students. These have unknown words in the left column and nothing in the right one for students to write down what they think about. They are also supposed to write down their opinions about some expressions taken from the text.
- The teacher asks the students to read the text again and answer the multiple choice questions having in mind the two exercises completed earlier.
- Students compare their answers and check. The teacher helps with those students who could not answer.

Practice:

- The teacher organizes students in groups of four. Then, she gives each group a set of words to be unscrambled. The first group to form coherent sentences must paste them on the board (These words were taken from the same text).
- The teacher helps the students check the sentences.

Evaluation: Students write down what they think about the activities done.

Self-evaluation: Students check how well they are doing against their own standards.

Expansion: Taking into account the main idea of the text, the students write down a composition.