FOCUS on Reading Comprehension

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Prerequisite for digital literacy
Teaching reading comprehension in the Netherlands

• Course books
• Many different simplified texts with random content, unilateral perspectives
• Strategy oriented questions, critical thinking not targeted
• Superficial reading (skimming, efferent stance)
• Low reading motivation, no reasons to read
• Largely ineffective
Challenge: develop more effective program (2012-ongoing)

• That develops rich mental networks for language comprehension (contextual knowledge)
  • That targets deep, immersed reading in order to build knowledge
• That fosters reading motivation
• That encourages students to think about what they read and understand (on paper and online)
  • That introduces multi-perspectivity to necessitate critical thinking
Challenge: develop new and very different program

- Started in 2012 with project THINK! (Houtveen, Brokamp, & Smits)
- Extensive literature study
- Design of new content oriented program
- Try-outs and changes
- Program THINK! ‘solidified’ in a first effectiveness study
- Need for further development with practitioners: FOCUS (Smits & van Koeven)
- 2018-2019 Professional learning community (PLC): FOCUS
Focus builds language, knowledge and active meaning making:

- content-oriented (as opposed to strategy-oriented);
- deep – thematic reading comes first;
- high quality books and texts with (multimodal) scaffolding
- conceptually coherent multimedia text sets
- primarily fiction;
- reading, listening, thinking, talking, and writing to engage in active meaning making

Grade 3 – 12 and beyond

Basic emphasis of FOCUS
Basic components of FOCUS

Consists of:

• Book – lessons (narrow reading) 40 minutes per day: at least 2 thematic books in 6-8 weeks
• Text – lessons (conceptually coherent multimedia text sets with scaffolding and multiple perspectives) 3x20 minutes per week
• Teacher reading aloud

Grade 3 – 12 and beyond
What did we learn in the PLC last year?
Integrate free voluntary reading and narrow thematic reading

Advantages of integration

- Time
- Available books
- Motivation (related to free choice)
It’s difficult to find well-written texts + the text lessons were too difficult.
It is difficult to know what to ask about texts, teachers easily revert to existing lists of closed questions.
Sustainable teacher learning was observed

- More and more teacher reasoning in the PLC (in reaction to questions of beginning teachers)
- Prolonged confrontation with program principles seems to positively influence the reasoning
- Enhanced quality of teacher pedagogical reasoning
- Teachers indicated that they would be able to implement the program themselves
Selected references


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