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# Reading beyond the lines

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## **Reading beyond the lines**

**By Sultana Ali Norozi**



GELLET (1981) states “reading is constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is often more important than what one finds in it”. So reading is not only interaction with the print but also comprehension of text according to background knowledge and experience of reader. It is safe to say that reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately.

Making connection is the key to comprehension and comprehension is the heart of reading. In order to comprehend the text, it requires the combination of several skills and processes. When one begins to read she or he has to make numerous decisions and usually they are made very quickly, almost unconsciously in most cases. For example when one picks up a newspaper he or she usually reads the front page with some combination of search processing, general reading comprehension and skimming. One reads partly for information, but also reads with a goal of finishing the newspaper. At some point, the reader will decide that she or he has enough information and will either stop reading or skim the remainder to be sure that she or he does not miss some informative part. The overall goal is not to remember most of the specific details but to have a good grasp of the main ideas and supporting ideas, and to relate those main ideas to background knowledge as appropriate.

One can say that people who read intelligently approach all material with a questioning mind. They read critically as well as accurately: they evaluate what the author says: they test the truth of the writing against their own knowledge and experience of reality. For example they do not accept statements and conclusions simply because they appear in print. In this regard it is important to understand that every one has different background knowledge and experience. Hence interpretation of the same text is different for people; it is based on the readers’ understanding and background knowledge.

A reader not only interacts with print but also monitors his/ her comprehension of it, interprets while reading, summarises and processes text during and after reading. This means that reading involves evaluation, synthesis, analysis and interpretation levels (Bloom’s taxonomy 1956). Evaluation information means being able to distinguish essential information or core concepts

from what is simply interesting. Synthesis information means taking new information and combining it with existing information to construct a new idea. Analysis information allows readers to make comparisons with the information in their background knowledge.

Lastly, interpretation is giving meaning to the idea or concepts. The reader identifies the hidden message by linking what is known to the information he or she is reading. This is what we call “reading between the lines” and “reading beyond the lines”. Interpretation takes analysis a step ahead by requiring the reader to not only form opinions but to also be able to cite evidence from the work to justify it.

The entire reading process, beginning with the focusing of the eye on the printed page and ending with the interpretation of information, is complex as it also involves schema formation. Bartlett (1932) is usually acknowledged as the first psychologist to use the term schema. According to him schema is an abstract knowledge structure which gets going during reading to infer the given information in the text. Schema activation includes a major role for inference during reading comprehension as the reader relies on knowledge of particular cases as well as abstract and general schemata. Schema is dynamics and differs from individual to individual even for same phenomenon. Comprehension and inference of same text by two readers differs also due to this psychological development.

As teachers, teacher educators, policy makers we have to consider the implication of reading comprehension process in context of government schools. We have to work out how we will be able to help our students in providing them ample time for reading comprehension in their classrooms. In most Pakistani schools students only read the text books in classrooms. They learn language, particularly English, by practice and imitation. Students don't have an opportunity to read any other kind of English text. How can reading of text books thus be made significant for students if they can not be given exposure to other reading texts in their classrooms? There are far too many students who leave our system without these foundational skills.

Teachers and teacher educators must raise the bar and ensure that all students have the background and training they need to comprehend reading. How can we provide an environment that exposes them to English reading within our limited time and resources? Some language teachers will consider it to be an additional burden on their already busy schedule. The reason is teachers' belief: that their primary job is to cover the syllabus. Despite all these challenges we should think of creative ways “think big but start small”.