

Article

A System of Tasks for Developing Comprehension, Interpretation and Evaluation Skills Through Media Resources

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Abstract: The article presents a system of tasks aimed at developing primary pupils' ability to understand, interpret and evaluate texts when working with media resources: illustrated books, audio recordings, cartoons and short videos. The system is organised in three blocks corresponding to reading skills and includes twelve task types. For each type the operation performed by the pupil and the media resource on which it is practised are specified. It is argued that tasks should require pupils to draw on words together with images or sound, and that their sequence should lead from locating information to the pupil's own judgement. Examples of tasks, an illustrative lesson, simple assessment criteria and the conditions for using the tasks in the classroom are provided.

Keywords: task system, media resource, text comprehension, interpretation, evaluation, reading literacy, primary school pupil.

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1. Introduction

Media resources have become a firm part of primary school practice. The teacher shows a cartoon based on a fairy tale, plays a recording of a poem read by an actor, uses an illustrated book or a short video about nature. Children themselves come to school with considerable experience of screens, and much of what they "read" outside the classroom combines words with moving images and sound. More than two decades ago it was argued that literacy pedagogy must expand to account for the multiplicity of communication channels and modes of meaning in contemporary societies, an idea summarised in the notion of multiliteracies [1]. Classroom research has since confirmed that school texts are increasingly multimodal and that this changes what it means to read and to teach reading [2]. The school cannot ignore this experience, but neither can it simply reproduce it.

In practice, however, a media resource often serves only as a break in the lesson or as a "visual aid". Viewing is followed by the question "Did you like it?", which requires no work with the text at all. In such cases the cartoon or the recording may even compete with the book: the bright moving picture is remembered, while the words of the author are forgotten. Research on technology-enhanced storybooks shows that multimedia features can either support young readers' comprehension or distract them, depending on whether they are connected with the story [3]. Studies of multimedia learning point in the same direction: words and pictures together promote understanding only when the learner is required to select and integrate information from both, while extraneous material that is not connected with the content reduces learning [4]. The developmental

potential of a media resource is therefore revealed only when it is built into a system of tasks that require the pupil to understand, compare and evaluate.

The aim of the article is to present a system of tasks that develops the skills of understanding, interpreting and evaluating a text when working with media resources in reading literacy lessons. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set: to identify the reading processes on which the system should be based; to define the requirements that each task must satisfy; to describe the task types and their sequence across the primary grades; and to outline the assessment criteria and conditions for classroom use.

2. Metrials and Methods

The study was carried out by means of pedagogical design, that is, the theoretically grounded construction of a teaching instrument and its description in a form suitable for classroom use. The design proceeded in four stages: (1) analysis of international frameworks and research literature on reading literacy, multimodal literacy and media education; (2) selection of the reading processes to be developed and their grouping into blocks; (3) formulation of task types and of the requirements applied to each of them; and (4) modelling of lessons in Grades 1 and 3 to verify that the task types can be combined within the ordinary structure of a reading lesson.

The comprehension processes described in the PIRLS framework served as the basis for identifying the blocks: retrieving information, making inferences, interpreting and integrating ideas, and evaluating content and form [5]. In the system these processes are grouped into three blocks, comprehension, interpretation and evaluation, which are easier for a primary teacher to keep in mind when planning a lesson. The requirement that tasks draw on more than one mode rests on research into multimodal literacy, which shows that the meaning of a picture book, a cartoon or a poster arises from the interaction of words, images and sound rather than from any one of them [6]. Practical approaches to teaching young readers to attend to the design elements of visual texts were also taken into account [7], together with the description of how colour, framing, gaze and composition carry meaning in images [8].

The tasks connected with evaluating media messages were built on concepts of media education, according to which even a young child can ask who created a message, for what purpose and for whom [9]. The understanding of media literacy as a set of competences ranging from access and analysis to reflection and action informed the formulation of the evaluation tasks [10]. The methodological tradition of building questions to a text was taken into account on the basis of works on the methodology of primary teaching [11].

An important theoretical point for the system is that a cartoon or an audio recording based on a literary work is not simply an illustration of it but a separate version with its own means of expression. Studies of picturebooks show that words and images may duplicate each other, complement each other or even tell different stories, and that the most productive reading arises where the two do not coincide completely [12]. The same applies to a film adaptation or a performed reading: the director chooses which episodes to show, the actor decides which words to stress, and the composer sets the mood. It is precisely these differences between versions that give pupils something to notice, compare and discuss.

At the third stage, each task type was described through three parameters: the operation performed by the pupil, the modes the pupil has to draw on, and the media resource on which the operation is practised. Two requirements were applied to every task. First, it must be impossible to complete the task by looking only at the picture or by reading only the words. Second, the tasks within the system must be ordered so that the pupil moves from locating information to forming a judgement of his or her own.

3. Results and Discussion

Structure of the task system. The system includes three blocks with four task types in each. Table 1 summarises the task types, the operation performed by the pupil and the media resource on which each type is practised.

Table 1. Structure of the system of tasks

Block	Task type	Operation performed by the pupil	Media resource
Comprehension	Find it in the picture or in the frame	Locates the moment in the image or video that corresponds to a given part of the text	Cartoon, illustrated book
	Match the word and the image	Labels frames or illustrations with words taken from the text	Illustrations, printed frames
	Restore the order	Arranges frames in the sequence of events	Cartoon frames
	Listen and find	Identifies words stressed by intonation, pauses and loudness	Audio recording
Interpretation	What is not in the text?	Identifies what the image or sound adds to the verbal text	Cartoon, illustrations
	Explain by the signs	Explains how music, colour or gesture conveys meaning	Cartoon, short video
	Compare the versions	Compares a character or episode in the book and in the adaptation	Book and cartoon
	Continue the frame	Draws a continuation consistent with the logic of events and characters	Printed frame
Evaluation	The author's choice	Judges why the artist or director made a particular choice	Illustrations, cartoon
	True or invented	Judges the believability of what is shown and justifies the answer	Short video
	Who and why	Identifies who made a media message and for what purpose	Short video, advertisement
	My opinion	Compares the expressiveness of the text, image and sound	Book, cartoon, recording

The system includes three blocks with four task types in each. The comprehension block contains the following types. In "Find it in the picture or in the frame" the pupil is asked, for example, to find the moment in a cartoon that is described in the third paragraph of the text. In "Match the word and the image" the pupil labels frames or illustrations with words taken from the text. In "Restore the order" the pupil arranges frames in the sequence of events of a fairy tale. In "Listen and find" the pupil works with an audio recording, answering questions such as "Which word did the actor say most loudly?" The interpretation block includes four further types. The task "What is not in the text?" asks what the cartoon shows that the book does not say. In "Explain by the signs" the pupil explains, for instance, how the music tells us that danger is coming. In "Compare the versions" the pupil compares a character in the book with the same character in the cartoon. In "Continue the frame" the pupil draws what happened after the frame that has been shown. The evaluation block consists of the types "The author's choice" (Why did the artist choose dark colours?), "True or invented" (Could this happen in real life? Prove it.), "Who and why" (Who made this video, and why do they want us

to watch it?) and “My opinion” (What shows the character better, the text or the cartoon?).

Content of the blocks. The comprehension block is aimed at retrieving information and at establishing correspondence between modes. Its tasks require the pupil to find in the image or the video what the text speaks about, and the other way round. Tasks on restoring a sequence are especially useful at this point: when arranging frames in order, the pupil relies both on the verbal text and on the visual logic of the events. The “Listen and find” type deserves a special mention, because it draws attention to sound as a carrier of meaning. Intonation, pauses and the loudness of the voice show what the performer considers important, and pupils learn to notice these features.

The interpretation block requires the pupil to go beyond information that is stated explicitly. Its central question is “What is not in the text?”, which makes the pupil notice the contribution of the image or the sound. Tasks comparing two versions of one work, for example a book and a cartoon, are particularly effective: the difference between the versions becomes obvious and makes children want to discuss why the authors acted differently. The task “Continue the frame” combines interpretation with creation, since the pupil can only draw a convincing continuation if he or she has understood the logic of the events and the characters.

The evaluation block lays the foundations of a critical attitude to texts and media messages. A primary pupil is quite able to judge whether the artist conveyed the mood well, whether what is shown is believable, and who made a video and why. Tasks in this block have no single correct answer, so they are assessed by the extent to which the pupil relies on details of the text and the image.

Sequence of tasks across the grades. Within the system the tasks are arranged in order of increasing difficulty: first locating and matching, then inferring and explaining, and finally judging. This progression follows the principle of the gradual release of responsibility, according to which the pupil moves from supported to increasingly independent performance [13]. In Grade 1 tasks of the first block predominate, with occasional tasks of the second block; by Grade 4 the share of tasks from the second and third blocks increases. This order does not mean that a lesson must contain tasks of only one block. On the contrary, a typical lesson moves through all three, but the weight of each changes from grade to grade.

Illustrative lessons. The work of the system can be shown with a Grade 3 lesson based on the Uzbek folk tale “Zumrad and Qimmat”. Before reading, the pupils look at two illustrations showing the girls and make predictions about their characters, which belongs to the comprehension block. After reading they complete the task “What is not in the text?”: the children find in the illustrations details of clothing, facial expressions and postures that emphasise the diligence of one heroine and the capriciousness of the other, which is interpretation. They then listen to a recording of an extract read by an actor and decide how the voice conveys the difference between the characters. The lesson ends with the task “My opinion”: what shows the heroines better, the text, the picture or the voice. This last task belongs to the evaluation block.

The system can also be used with younger pupils. In a Grade 1 lesson on a short poem about autumn, the children first listen to a recording of the poem read by an actor and complete the task “Listen and find”: they raise a hand each time they hear a word naming a colour. They then look at an illustration to the poem and, in the task “Match the word and the image”, place cards with the words they have heard next to the corresponding details of the picture. At the end of the lesson they answer the question “What did you like more, listening to the poem or looking at the picture, and why?”. Even at this early stage the lesson moves from locating information to a simple judgement, and every task requires the child to connect two modes.

Preparing a lesson with the system takes the teacher several steps. The teacher first chooses the literary work and the media resource that accompanies it, then decides

which parts of the text the resource will be connected with. After that, one or two task types are selected from each block in accordance with the grade and the aim of the lesson, and the necessary materials are prepared: frames, cards with words, a short extract of video or audio. Finally, the teacher decides which assessment criterion will be the focus of the lesson, so that pupils know in advance what will be valued in their answers.

Assessment. Simple criteria, understandable to both teacher and pupil, are used to assess the tasks: reliance on the text, reliance on the image or sound, the connection made between them, and the soundness of the judgement. Similar criteria are recommended in studies on assessing visual literacy, which stress that a child should not only name what is seen but also explain how the image creates meaning [14]. The results are used formatively, showing which block of tasks needs further work; research on classroom assessment shows that feedback used in this way to adjust teaching produces substantial gains in learning [15]. For example, if pupils name details of a picture readily but cannot say how these details relate to the text, the teacher gives more tasks of the “Match the word and the image” and “What is not in the text?” types in the following lessons.

Discussion. The main feature of the proposed system is that every task requires the pupil to draw on at least two modes. This distinguishes it from traditional questions about an illustration, which can be answered by looking at the picture alone. The task “Label the frames with words from the text”, for instance, cannot be done without reading, and the task “How does the music tell us that danger is coming?” cannot be done without careful listening. In this way the media resource turns from a supplement into a full object of reading. This is consistent with the view that multimodal literacy in the classroom requires pupils to read across modes rather than treat images as decoration of the verbal text [16].

The use of video and cartoons requires certain conditions. The extract should be short, no longer than two or three minutes; the task should be given before viewing, so that pupils know what to pay attention to; and viewing should always be followed by a return to the verbal text. These conditions are consistent with the meta-analytic findings on technology-enhanced storybooks discussed in the Introduction: media effects congruent with the story support comprehension, whereas effects unrelated to it distract young readers. The evaluation block brings elements of media education into the lesson. The question “Who made this video and why?” may seem difficult for a young pupil, but in a simple form children readily discuss, for example, the difference between a cartoon and an advertisement. Such tasks lay the foundation of the critical, reflective engagement with texts that pedagogies of multiliteracies regard as a goal of new learning [17]. International frameworks of media and information literacy also regard the ability to find, understand and evaluate information from various sources as a basic competence of a modern person [18].

The system can also be used where technical equipment is limited. If there is no projector in the classroom, the cartoon can be replaced by a series of printed frames, and the audio recording by the teacher’s own reading with pauses and intonation marked in advance. The main condition is preserved: the task must require the pupil to relate several modes to each other. This makes the system applicable in any school and does not make its effectiveness depend on the availability of digital devices.

Differentiation deserves separate attention. Pupils who still have difficulties with the technique of reading can be given first-block tasks supported by an audio recording of the text, so that the burden of decoding does not prevent them from relating word and image. Stronger pupils can be offered tasks on comparing versions and on creating a frame of their own that continues the story. In this way one and the same system allows the teacher to work with a class in which the children’s level of preparation differs.

Much depends on the way the teacher conducts the discussion. Tasks of the second and third blocks open the way to conversation in which pupils express different views,

and the teacher's main concern here is not to rush to the "correct" answer. Questions such as "What makes you think so?" or "Where in the text or in the picture can you see this?" return the child to the evidence and teach him or her to support an opinion. At first the teacher can model this reasoning aloud, showing how one detail of a picture is linked to a sentence of the text, and later hand the role of questioner over to the pupils themselves.

The choice of media resources also requires care. A resource should be appropriate to the age of the pupils, short enough to be used in the lesson, of good artistic quality and clearly connected with the text being read. It is useful to have both adaptations that follow the text closely and those that depart from it, since the latter create natural material for the "Compare the versions" task. National fairy tales, cartoons and recordings in the Uzbek language deserve priority, because they make the material close to the children's own culture and experience.

At the same time, the limitations of the present work should be acknowledged. The system has so far been developed at the level of pedagogical design, and several questions can only be answered through experimental teaching: what proportion of the three blocks is optimal for each grade, how much lesson time the tasks of each type require, and how quickly pupils move from relying on one mode to connecting several. The assessment criteria described above also need to be checked for consistency when they are applied by different teachers to the same pupils' work.

It should be stressed that the system does not replace traditional work on a text, such as reading aloud, vocabulary work, retelling and discussion of the content. It complements this work and fits into the usual structure of the lesson. The teacher can use individual task types depending on the aim of the lesson, without necessarily going through all three blocks in a single session.

4. Conclusion

The proposed system includes three blocks, comprehension, interpretation and evaluation, and twelve task types, each of which requires the pupil to draw on the word together with the image or sound. The tasks are arranged in order of increasing difficulty and are distributed across the primary grades. The system turns the media resource from a visual aid into an object of reading and can be used with both printed and digital materials. Its distinctive features are the obligatory reliance on at least two modes in every task, the sequence of tasks from locating information to the pupil's own judgement, and the use of simple criteria that make the assessment formative. The system does not depend on the availability of digital equipment and can be implemented with printed frames and the teacher's own reading.

Further work involves testing the system in experimental teaching and creating a bank of tasks for the works included in the "O'qish savodxonligi" (Reading Literacy) programme for Grades 1–4, indicating for each work the block, the task type and the recommended media resource. Experimental teaching should also establish the optimal proportion of the three blocks in each grade and verify the consistency of the assessment criteria when applied by different teachers.

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