Metacognition and reading

What's the idea?

The purpose of reading is to understand text – to construct meaning from the written word. Metacognition is a well-evidenced, key component in enabling pupils to do this effectively (Baker and Beall, 2009; Zabrucky et al., 2015).

What does it mean?

Metacognition is comprised of two main elements:

1. Metacognitive knowledge:

- Knowing about your cognitive abilities, e.g. I don't understand these geographical terms.

- Knowing about particular tasks, e.g. This science report needs to follow a specific structure

- Knowing about what strategies are available and when to use them, e.g. I need to check the meaning of some of these words or I could misunderstand the whole task.

2. Metacognitive regulation:

- Involves cognitive activities such as planning, monitoring, evaluating and revising strategies, and reflecting.

- Is concerned with what learners do about their learning, how they monitor and act on what they know.

Good readers use metacognitive strategies before, during and after reading to think about their reading. However, the process of using metacognitive strategies is complex. It is influenced by the knowledge and experience of the reader, the content and features of the text and the reading context. For example, we might quickly scan an advert, though carefully read instructions to book a flight.

What are the action points for teachers?

1. The first step is to create the right climate; a classroom environment that promotes metacognition skills and where it's okay to make mistakes.

2. Model each element of metacognitive skills: planning, evaluating, monitoring..

3. Promote and facilitate metacognitive talk within the classroom.

4. Explicitly teach pupils strategies.

5. Consider the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

6. Allow time for reflection.

7. For students who are struggling, explicit teaching and key strategies are important, though should be scaffolded from current levels to ensure learning.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following web resources might be helpful:

» Getting started with metacognition

» Metacognition and self-regulation: Evidence summaries

» Metacognition and self-regulation: Summary of recommendations

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