

TEACHERS' COMPETENCE FOR DEVELOPING READER'S RECEPTION METACOGNITION

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Abstract

In recent years metacognition has emerged as a major focus of research interest in cognitive psychology. There has been a growing recognition that metacognition or self awareness including awareness of ourselves as learners helps us to learn more effectively. Also metacognition on self awareness of readers helps the reader to reconstruct a deeper understanding of a text, he is reading. Different kind of texts needs different reading strategies and consequently different ways of metacognitive thinking, which have to be developed in the frame of school curriculum. Literature curriculum should in this context develop reader's reception metacognition. The article draws upon research currently being undertaken in Slovene schools on teachers' competence to develop the readers' reception metacognition of children as readers in schools. It presents the results of the study, where the lack of knowledge about reader's reception metacognition and the lack of knowledge about the strategies for developing reader's reception metacognition were established. The article also presents the results of teachers training course for developing reader's reception metacognition on teacher's competence for developing reader's reception metacognition.

Key words: horizon of expectation, metacognition, metacognitive thinking, reader's reception metacognition, teaching competence.

Introduction

In recent years metacognition has emerged as a major focus of research interest in cognitive psychology (Metcalf, Shimamura, 1996). There has been a growing recognition that metacognition or self awareness including awareness of ourselves as learners helps us to learn more effectively. Consequently metacognition on self awareness of readers helps the reader to reconstruct a deeper understanding of literary work.

But what is metacognition? How does it facilitate learning and how does it develop? What is reader's reception metacognition? What can teachers do to foster it in the classroom? And which competences need teachers to foster reader's reception metacognition in the classroom?

Metacognition

The term *metacognition* was introduced by Flavell (1979) to refer to 'the individual's own awareness and consideration of his or her cognitive processes and strategies' (Flavell, 1979). It refers to that unique human capacity of people to be self-reflexive, not just to think and know but to think about their own thinking and knowing. *Metacognition* refers to the

awareness that learners have about their general academic strengths and weaknesses and of the cognitive resources they can apply to meet the demands of particular tasks and, second, to their knowledge and skill about how to regulate engagement in tasks to optimize learning processes and outcomes (Winne, Perry, 2000).

According to Zimmermann (2000) learners can be described as self-regulatory to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally and strategically active participants in their own learning. There is wide agreement on this statement in contemporary »learning psychology« (Boekaerts, 2002; Brown, Campione, 1996; Paris, Paris, 2001; Pintrich, 2000). Flavell argues that if we can bring the process of learning to a conscious level, we can help children to be more aware of their own thought processes and help them to gain control or mastery over the organisation of their learning (Flavell et. al., 1995). On this view effective learning is not just the manipulation of information so that it is integrated into an existing knowledge base, but also involves directing one's attention to what has been assimilated, understanding the relationship between the new information and what is already known, understanding the processes which facilitated this, and being aware when something new has actually been learned.

Reader's Reception of a Literary Text – Metacognition

It has been proven that many poor readers, readers, who spend almost all reading energy for decoding words in the text, are unaware of strategic problem solving elements in their approach to tasks (Wray 1994, Wray, Lewis, 1997) – what initiated a vivid research in reading metacognition. Metacognitive reading strategies such as 'reciprocal teaching' are reported as producing considerable gains in comprehension among poor readers (Palincsar, Brown, 1984). These improvements have been maintained over time, and show evidence of transfer and generalization to other areas of learning. We could assume that along to this *the development of metacognition in the case of reading literary text* could have the same (or at least similar) positive effects on students' understanding literary texts – and that teaching *reader's reception metacognition* (RRM) would get the same attention of teaching research as the teaching of *reading metacognition*. Surprisingly this did not happen. Almost no research has been done about the teachers competence of teaching reader's reception metacognition, almost no effort about the strategies, teachers' could use in the classroom to teach their students to understand, what is happening, when they read fiction and what could they do, to understand better and deeper.

The literature didactic curriculum for teachers defines various teachers' competencies for teaching literature in the classroom. It points out teacher's scientific competences, his knowledge of literature history and of literature theory, it mentions his general pedagogic and didactical competence and his special literature didactic knowledge (Krakar Vogel, 2004) – but in the frame of the last one doesn't mention his knowledge about the reception theory and connected – knowledge about the importance of student's horizon of expectations. As a consequence observing the school reality (see later in the text)) shows that L1¹ teachers are very well trained to be literature scientists (their knowledge of literature history and literature theory is excellent) but they know very little about the reception theory, and know hardly anything about the students' horizons of expectations. Such situation dictates a new consideration about the L1 teachers training curriculum and especially a consideration about the new literary didactic competence: a competence for developing students' *reader's reception metacognition* (RRM) and in this framework also a competence for detecting the quality of students' horizons of expectations. To develop such competences L1 teacher should get some new knowledge and some new skills: he should gain knowledge about the aesthetic reception, about RRM, insight

1 The term *L1* is used instead of the term *mother tongue*. The change of the term is the consequence of the globalisation: the teaching language is for many children not mother tongue.

about his own reception metacognition and about the importance of developing RRM at his students, he should learn strategies for developing students' MMR and he should learn which are the strategies for detecting the quality of students' horizon of expectations.

Readers' Reception Metacognition and the Horizon of Expectations

Knowledge about RRM can be derived from the reception theory and reader response theory. The reception theory originated from the work of H. R. Jauss in the late 1960s and is a version of reader response literary theory that emphasizes the reader's reception of a literary text. According to Jauss (1982) a literary work, even if it seems new, does not appear as something absolutely new, in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its readers to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its 'beginning' arouses expectations for the 'middle and end', which can then be continued intact, changed, reoriented or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading according to certain rules of the genre or type of text.

Realizing the importance of understanding how the reader's interpretation is produced, Jauss introduced the concept of "horizon of expectations" in order to reveal the way in which the text interacts with the reader's interpretation. Jauss explains that the horizon of expectations is formed through the reader's life experience, customs and understanding of the world, which have an effect on the reader's social behaviour."(Jauss, 1982: 39) In short: Students' understanding of literary text is limited with his competence to overlap his horizon of expectations with the literary text. According to all this, L1 teacher should know each of his students has his own, very specific horizon of expectation.

Strategies for Developing Students' RRM

The development of reader's reception metacognition (RRM) should be an important part of literature education in school. L1 teacher should encourage his students to observe and understand the process of his reception, the process of noticing textual clues, the process of overlapping them with his own horizon of expectations, his own knowledge and understanding of the world, and finally the process of constructing his own meaning of the literary work – a meaning which is unique, in the sense that no other reader could construct exactly the same meaning and that also he himself will never again understand this literary work in the same way.

And which strategies can a teacher use for developing students' RRM? Teacher should encourage every student to ask questions, as: How did he understand this poem/tale/drama? Why did he understand that way? What influenced his understanding of this literary work? Which textual clues did he take in the consideration to construct his meaning? What did he oversee and his classmates didn't?

With such strategies offers L1 teacher the learning environment that encourages the development of students' RRM. In such conversations a student can begin to think about the reception process as such and about his own reception process – and slowly he will begin to understand what influences the way, he is constructing the textual meaning. He will become aware of his own horizon of expectations: of his standpoints, his preferences, his knowledge, his experiences in life in experiences with literature – and consequently his interests and his motivation for reading literature.

On this base a student can develop his RRM, his metacognitive competence, which includes a conscious control of reception process, conscious planning of further literary experiences, conscious selection of reading strategies and conscious observing of his own progress from spontaneous to the reflexive level of receptive competence.

Strategies for Detecting the Quality of Students' Horizon of Expectations

According to reception theory readers' reception metacognition includes the awareness of his horizon of expectations. Developing *students' horizon of expectation awareness* is an essential part of L1 teachers' strategy for developing RRM competence. With teachers' help each student thinks (and talks) about his literature reading, about his reception competence, about his intertextual experiences, about his attitude toward literature reading, about influences, his environment has/had on his literature reading, what does he likes to read about, how is his reception competence changing/developing. This way a student becomes aware of processes, activities, standpoints, environment and experiences that influence his reception of literature and he is aware of his weaknesses and strengths in the process of reading literature. A student is following his own thinking process, while thinking about literary text.

For the process of developing the RRM it is important that the student knows himself and his own horizon of expectations – and it is equally important that the teacher knows the horizons of expectation of his students. But in the literature class reality he usually doesn't. Or he knows some parts of horizon of expectations of very few students' – the knowledge, he has got accidentally in interpretation conversations with this students. In the context of developing RRM L1 teacher should learn some *strategies for detecting and evaluating the horizon of expectations* of his students'. To mention only some: a questionnaire about the literary aesthetic family environment, a reading portfolio, questionnaire about reading habits and attitudes, check list, a reflexive letter, guided interview, poster of reading activities, comics: *My favourite heroes in a new story*, reading line – student presents history of his reading, computer presentation/ www page/blog: *My reading experiences*, exhibition of favourite books ... With this strategies can both: a teacher and a student recognize, monitor and evaluate horizons of expectations.

Knowing the actual level of student's reception competence as a part of his horizon of expectation teacher knows where students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1977) is and he can plan and guide the very possible next step in students' receptive competence.

Methodology of Research

The research was focused on teachers' competence for developing students' RRM. First teachers' existing competence for detecting students' horizon of expectation was examined. After intervention in a form of informal education, especially designed training, where teachers' knowledge about students' horizons of expectations and knowledge about strategies for establishing horizons of expectations was developed, teachers' competence for developing students' RRM was investigated for the second time. After performing the informal education course teachers' evaluation of their own progress was tested and results were presented.

Participants of Research

The research was performed in three phases. In the first phase 274 L1 teachers were included in the second phase 30 L1 teachers were included. In the first phase was investigated, what kind of knowledge have L1 teachers about RRM. Teachers were asked if they establish students' horizon of expectations before planning yearly curriculum for literature teaching. The same teachers were asked to self-evaluate their competence for developing students' RRM and with that connected horizon of expectations. Their motivation for teaching development of RRM competence was examined. From those teachers, who declared, they would need more knowledge, 30 teachers were randomly chosen. In the second phase followed the implementation of RRM education for teachers. After performing this especially designed training teachers were asked to evaluate their progress and importance of knowledge for developing students' RRM competence.

Instrument of Research

For the *first phase* a questionnaire was used. With this questionnaire was investigated the existence of RRM knowledge, the awareness of the importance to develop students' RRM and the motivation for further education. In connection with RRM, we asked 274 L1 teachers the following questions:

1. Do you examine your students' horizons of expectations and thus their reception ability before the annual curriculum planning for literature teaching?
2. Do you feel you are competent to detect differences in your students' horizons of expectations and to develop students' RRM?
3. Would you like to receive training, how to detect differences in the students' horizon of expectations and how to develop students' RRM?

In this phase of the research it turned out that L1 teachers do not feel competent to develop students' RRM. Therefore 30 L1 teachers from those who expressed the motivation for further education were randomly selected and educated in an especially designed course.

The *second phase* was the implementation of education for teachers. The curriculum for the course was prepared very carefully. First teachers' existing RRM competency was examined. Their literature classes were observed and evaluated according to pre-established criteria. Then teachers' lesson preparations were analysed. Training course was divided into three thematic sections. After each training unit teachers tested new acquired skills with elements of action research.

In the first meeting reception theory was introduced to the teachers. Reception aesthetics was introduced as a methodological direction that defines the reception of literary text as an interaction between text and reader's understanding of the world. Then the term horizon of expectations was introduced. The dialog between the text and reader's horizon of expectations can be spontaneously or reflexive. It was pointed out that reflexive reception is associated with the distanced reader's thinking and therefore his RRM. At the first training L1 teachers were taught what the horizon of expectations is, the factors which affect it, and the focus on the reader/learner in connection with it. After the first training the teachers were asked to study what was the literary aesthetic environment of their students. The findings were presented at the second training meeting.

The aim of the second meeting was to link RRM and motivation for reading literature. L1 teachers were instructed on the importance and impact of RRM on motivation for reading. The workshop produced a variety of strategies through which they examined their students' attitude to reading according to their family's attitude towards literature, previous literature teacher (how they affected their motivation), stress they experienced during literacy process (or have learned to read quickly, with problems ...), the literary interest (thematic, genre, gender ...), intertextual experience and impact of contemporary media. Based on these findings, teachers encouraged students to observe and be self-reflexive in processing and understanding of literary reading and thinking about the causes of motivation or lack of motivation for reading literature. Teachers reported about these findings at the third meeting.

The third meeting was designed for training L1 teachers to think about their own RRM because knowledge about their own RRM is necessary if they want to develop students' RRM. In addition, L1 teachers were looking for ways how to use their new knowledge on the horizon of expectations and RRM in the curriculum for literature teaching and the teaching itself. To help, we offered teachers a didactic reminder that encourages literature teaching according to the students' horizon of expectations and development of students' RRM.

The *third phase* of research was performed after teachers finished the course. RRM competency was observed again. Teachers re-planned their literature classes. Their literature classes were observed to find out the differences in their didactic performance. Finally teachers' self-evaluated lectures and their experience with research, and thus expanded their field of awareness on the importance of developing students' RRM.

Results of Research

In the first phase of research L1 teachers were asked whether they know their students' horizon of expectations before they plan the literature curriculum for the next school year for the particular class. The answers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Do you check-up the horizon of expectation of your future students and so their reception skills before planning their literature curriculum for the next year?

Yes		No		Total	
n	f%	n	f%	n	f%
56	20.4	218	79.6	274	100

The majority (79, 6%) of L1 teachers do not check-up the horizon of expectations of their students, which means they do not know the starting point of students' reception skills. They are obviously not aware of importance of this information for their understanding the process of students' constructing the meaning of literary work. Consequently they cannot understand this process – and are not qualified for developing students' understanding of constructing the meaning of literature, for developing students' RRM.

Table 2. Do you feel competent enough for detecting differences in students' horizons of expectations and with those developing students' RRM?

Yes		No		Total	
n	f %	n	f %	n	f %
69	25.2	205	74.8	274	100

Most teachers (74.8%) replied that they do not feel qualified enough to detect differences in the horizons of expectations and the development of students' RRM. We believe that such a high percentage of responses are due to lack of knowledge of a technical term from the theory of reception aesthetics - a horizon of expectations. It first appears in the updated curriculum in 2011.

From those responses consecutive follow responses related to education on this topic. 93.4% of L1 teachers responded that they would like to get educated and get trained to detect the difference in students' horizons of expectations (and based on them to develop RRM skills). Answers are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Do you wish to educate yourself for detecting differences in students' horizons of expectations and developing students' RRM?

Yes		No		Total	
n	f%	n	f%	n	f%
256	93.4	18	6.6	274	100

Since L1 teachers are not qualified to detect / identify the horizons of expectations and the differences in the reception of literature by the students and thus to develop RRM and that they themselves have expressed the need for additional education, we formed a group of 30 teachers and trained them for RRM competency.

After the RRM training course teachers were asked about their opinion about the importance of developing student's RRM and about the importance of students RRM for the motivation for reading fiction.

Table 4. Teachers' opinions about the importance of developing students' RRM.

	Yes		Total	
	n	f %	n	f %
a) It is important to develop student's RRM.	30	100	30	100
b) Developing RRM helps with motivation for reading literature.	27	81	30	100

All 30 teachers (100%), participating in qualitative research, think that it is important that students know their literary interests; that they know how they build their own meaning of literary text and that teachers develop students' RRM.

Answers to questions: what do they think about the importance of developing RRM and if it can contribute to the motivation to read are very similar: 27 teachers (81%) agree that development of RRM contributes to the motivation for reading. Their opinions can be summarized in the claim that students' knowledge of their own literary interests, thinking about their own reading of literary texts, embracing their own reading and learning about the strong and weak areas in the processing of literary texts contribute to the motivation for reading literature. The figures can be illustrated with the individual teachers' quotes:

Teacher 1: "I think it is very important for students to be aware of their own attitude to reading and why and what they like to read; and why and what do not like to read, because only when students understand their own thinking about their literary experience we can help them to further develop their "affection" for reading. Students should be aware of what their weak and strong areas are because only through that they can exceed those frames."

Teacher 2: "Students can use their knowledge of and interest in reading by thinking about what they think about their reading of literature and being aware of this, why are reluctant to read or read only because they have to (for school), change their external motivation for reading literature to internal, as yet it leads to a lasting interest in reading."

Teacher 3: "It seems very important that students know their literary interests and how they create the literary world, this is the only way they can influence themselves or with the assistance of someone who tries to direct them, and this could be a teacher, a parent or a classmate. As a teacher I know who loves to read and who does not and why. And according to this I set my aim;

what I want to reach with an individual student or a student sets a goal (guided), in the kind of reader he /she should develop. If students know their literary interests, they easily choose what to read, if they know what they read, their reading does not seem pointless or a waste of time, if you know how you feel while reading, and if this is a nice feeling, you want to recapture those feelings – in that case reading brings a lot of positive, a teacher can also support that, but only if he/she knows his students' literary interests (deliberately - otherwise things happen more randomly). I believe that students need to develop RRM deliberately, accompanied, encouraged, because this is the only way to achieve the highest possible expectations in terms of individual motivation to read.”

Discussion

Developing RRM in literature education means to inquire students' thinking about their relationship and attitudes to (reading) literature. Developing RRM means to teach students to be aware of and monitor the process of perception and understanding of literary texts, and use pre-reading and in-the-course-of-reading strategies and after-reading strategies. Students are encouraged to self-question themselves about their own reading of literature and conscious monitoring and evaluation of their own reading. A student with developed RRM recognizes his previous intertextual experiences, feelings, emotions while reading literature and the reasons for them. This means that a student knows thoughts and cognitive strategies he/she uses at reception of literary texts. Because of this a student gets a better - reflexive - reader and not only that, during metacognitive processes he/she becomes aware of his/her internal (intrapersonal) self. RRM also helps him/her to become a critical reader / observer of literary texts, because on this basis he/she can be independently aware / evaluates how a literary text affects his/her images and beliefs.

To develop students' RRM teacher must know his/her RRM, which represents the starting point for further work with students, he must know the importance of developing students' RRM (why to it develop at the first place), he must possess the knowledge of what the horizon of expectations is, he must be aware of the horizon of expectations for the experience and understanding of literary texts, he must be competent to develop students' RRM and in the context of this knowledge and he must know the strategies for identifying students' horizons of expectations. The results of our investigation show, that Slovene L1 teachers do not have the knowledge and skills for developing student's RRM. Even more: the results show that the majority of L1 teachers do not know that they don't know. But the results show also something else: with carefully designed informal education, carefully oriented to the needs of teachers and their students, a RRM competence can be successfully developed.

Conclusions

For the development and assessment of students' RRM and horizons of expectations a teacher must be properly qualified, what the educational curriculum for teachers does not provide. There is an option to acquire these skills in further education, in a way that allows a teacher to acquire new (modern) literary reception and literary didactic skills, relevant experience (research his/her own practice and his/her thinking), with the possibility to exchange experiences, opinions and discussions and critical reflection.

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