

Developing Codes for Text-Marking

Text-marking is an instructional strategy that teachers can use to ensure student reading engagement and critical thinking during the reading process. The coding system used in text-marking establishes the purpose for reading a text. Students focus on a specific line of thinking represented by the symbols in the code that they mark on their text as they read. This results in students' closer reading and thinking about information in the text. Greater comprehension is the positive outcome.

The success of text-marking relies on the quality of the codes that the teacher develops. Careful selection of code symbols is necessary in order for text-marking to be effective. This means that it is important for teachers to distinguish the difference between shallow and deep coding systems.

Shallow Coding

A shallow system of code symbols can be used with any text which may engage students during text reading. For students needing practice opportunities to monitor their own general comprehension, a shallow coding system may be appropriate. However, it does not necessarily help students think deeply as they read.

Examples

- N = new information
- I = I know this
- ? = I don't understand
- C = Connection
- A = Agree
- D = Disagree
- ☺ = I like this
- ☹ = I don't like this
- ! = This is important

Shallow codes promote lower-level thinking. Typically, they focus the reader on his or her reaction to something that is read in text. It supports the reader to engage in the process of monitoring his or her own comprehension. Less complex texts that are used for independent student reading can work with shallow coding systems.

In contrast, **deep coding** promotes higher-level thinking. Typically, this system zooms in on lesson objectives and challenges the reader to focus on cognitive patterns of thinking such as compare and contrast or cause and effect. More complex texts are required for deeper coding systems.

Developing a Coding System

Two aspects that educators need to consider as they begin developing a coding system include:

- the purpose for reading the text that has been selected for a lesson.
- the predominant patterns of thinking behind the text.

Deep Coding

A deep coding system challenges students to think with greater depth as they read. This type of coding aligns with the thinking behind the text and/or the text topic. These codes reflect complex thinking such as cause/effect and compare/contrast.

Examples

- Text-reading that focuses on cause and effect:
 - M = Much impact
 - L = Little impact
 - C = Cause
 - E = Effect
- Text-reading that includes multiple perspectives:
 - T = Threat
 - H = Hopeful
 - N = Neutral
 - P1 = Perspective 1
 - P2 = Perspective 2
- Text-reading that focuses on problem and solution:
 - P = Problem
 - S = Solution
- Text-reading that focuses on compare/contrast:
 - S = Similar/Same
 - D = Different

PLANNING A COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE LESSON

Purpose for Reading: First, the teacher needs to ask: *What is the best instructional purpose for my students to read this text?* If the purpose is to target basic comprehension after independent student reading, then a shallow code is appropriate. However, if the purpose for reading is to challenge critical thinking, then a deep code is necessary.

Thinking Tasks/Patterns of the Text & Benchmark: Next, the teacher needs to ask: *What is the predominant thinking task or thinking pattern behind this text and the benchmark or standard that I am targeting in my lesson?* Examples of thinking tasks can include categorization or identification. Complex thinking can include such patterns as comparison, contrast, cause and effect, or problem/solution.

Text Characteristics: Once a particular thinking task or pattern has been identified, the teacher will need to analyze the characteristics of the text by asking: *What words, concepts, or facets in the text represent this thinking task or pattern?* An expository text that focuses on a conflict can represent either compare & contrast or cause/effect thinking. A literary text that focuses on debate between characters indicates that “argument” is a central facet. For such a text, the following coding system could be appropriate:

- A = argument
- L = logical support
- I = illogical support

Student Support: To finalize the coding system, the teacher will need to think about the learning needs of the students by asking: *How much support do I need to build into the coding system?* Using a previous example (expository text focusing on a conflict), the teacher can develop a more complex set of codes with cause/effect thinking for those students ready for a greater challenge. For this text and these students, the following coding system could be appropriate:

- M = much impact
- S = some impact
- L = little impact

Using the same text with lower-performing students, the teacher could use the compare/contrast pattern of thinking to develop an appropriate coding system:

- P = actions to protect the crew
- R = actions that put the crew at risk

Although this second set of students may have been less prepared for challenge than the first set, it is still possible for the teacher to use multiple readings of the same text to scaffold the lower-performing students toward cause/effect thinking. The teacher could have them read the text the first time using the compare/contrast codes. Then, they could use the cause/effect codes during their second reading.

Double-Check: After a set of codes has been finalized, the teacher will need to ask:

Will this coding system really work with this text?

To answer this question, it will be necessary for the teacher to “try it out” by using the codes to read and mark the text. This ensures that the code will work for the lesson.

Additional Deep Coding

H = hypothesis
O = observation

FI = finding
FA = fact

P = problem
S = solution
N = neutral

P = Political
S = Social
E = Economic

I = initial event
S = subsequent event
P = post event

S = plant structure
H = plant habitat

S = substance
R = reaction
P = product of reaction

P = problem
S = solution
L = little control

A = argument
AKP = argument key point
C = counterargument
CKP = counter-argument key point