Language didactics

with Dr Marie-France Côté

Talking *points*

Knowledge
1. What is anaphora?
2. What percentage of primary school students encounter difficulties in text comprehension?

Comprehension
3. What are some of the challenges faced by young learners in decoding words when learning to read?
4. How does the process of reading a word differ in languages like French and English?
5. Why is it important to be able to understand both explicit and implicit information in reading comprehension?
6. What are the characteristics of the ESPACE assessment tool?

Application
7. If you were to design an assessment tool for first grade students, what factors would you consider, based on the insights from Marie-France's article?
8. How might a teacher adapt reading assessments for first grade students to accommodate the limited cognitive resources available for word identification?

Analysis
9. Discuss Marie-France's findings regarding the performance of typical and at-risk readers. What implications does this have for education?
10. How does the ESPACE assessment tool address the varying needs of first-grade students?

Evaluation
11. Discuss the potential advantages and limitations of the ESPACE assessment tool in effectively identifying and supporting students with reading comprehension difficulties, considering factors such as cultural and linguistic diversity. What strategies or adaptations could be implemented to enhance its effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of students?

Activity

Helping beginning readers
Marie-France highlights that the first challenge for beginning readers is related to word identification. Imagine you are an elementary school teacher, and your goal is to find engaging ways to help young readers overcome challenges with reading words and understanding their sounds. Collaborate with your classmates/friends and devise a series of activities to help elementary school students learn and remember key words, graphemes and phonemes.

Mind-map creative and engaging strategies that you believe would help younger students overcome these challenges. For example, you could:
• Create fun mnemonics or memory aids for irregular words or tricky grapheme-phoneme mappings.
• Develop interactive games that help students to practise blending sounds together to form words.
• Use visual aids to reinforce key concepts (e.g., create flashcards with pictures representing different graphemes and phonemes, along with their corresponding sounds, to help students make connections between letters and sounds).

Once you have completed your activities, present them to the rest of the class. Make sure to explain how you would implement them and why you believe your approach would be effective. After all the presentations are complete, discuss with your classmates the importance of using innovative and inclusive teaching strategies to support beginning readers' literacy development.

Design your own reading comprehension assessment
Inspired by Marie-France's research, who has dedicated her work to understanding the complexities of reading comprehension among young learners, create a set of reading texts varying in complexity, similar to the ESPACE assessment tool mentioned in the article. Each text should be accompanied by comprehension questions targeting specific cognitive abilities, such as understanding anaphora and making inferences. After completing the texts and questions, reflect on the process.
• What insights did you gain about designing assessments for young readers?
• How did you decide on the complexity level of each text?
• What strategies did you employ to ensure the comprehension questions addressed different cognitive abilities?