Reading Activity

Reading Activity: Synthesizing* – A Demanding Strategy

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[*Synthesizing*: *Bringing together different cognitive skills, such as using prior knowledge and newly acquired ideas, making connections and inferences, and summarizing in order to create new meaning or a new structure leading to an original understanding of a text.*]

Objective:

To facilitate readers to synthesize any text that they read by linking it to other related texts, summarizing, generating new ideas and making inferences and all these to formulate new perspectives.

Participation: Individual

Material:

Any text – for example, a brief news item in a daily about Alexa (a Voice Assistant) made me curious about it.

Preparation:

Identifying relevant materials, familiarizing with them to find out their relationships and creating new pattern of knowledge based on it.

Procedure:

Background: I read the news item on Alexa and came to know that we could ask many things from it, for instance, "Alexa, how is the weather this morning?" A female voice would respond with the weather report instantly. This goaded me to gather more information as it performs something fascinating, which I thought was incredible. (Certainly, slow to catch up! – nil schema!). Googling Alexa led me to its official site,

Alexa Voice Service (AVS), and I realized that we can talk to it "with the wake word 'Alexa' and receive voice responses and content instantly." Also, this device has built-in microphone and speaker and developed by Amazon. Interestingly, it was created by Rohit Prasad (Indian) along with his colleague, Tony Reid. Having read some more of its features, another question popped up whether it is the only one of its kind and what surprised me was the quantum of voice assistants available in the market now - more than 3 billion and expected to hit 8 billion in another two or three years. And the popular ones I gathered are: besides Amazon's Alexa, there are Microsoft's Cortana, Google's Assistant and Apple's Siri and several more. They can be installed in any internet connected device namely phone, tablet and streaming box.

Engaged in collecting more information about each of them, I was further driven to the timeline of the voice assistants: it is traced back to 1960s, but only in the current decade they exploded into popularity. I was able to compare some of these devices closely and recognized the extent of similarities and differences among them in terms of their appearances and operations.

The way the giant corporations are researching into how their voice assistants can be made more user-friendly and multi-purposeful, I could foresee that they will be omnipresent in the days to come. Fast

tracking into the future, one could imagine that the lifestyle will be radically different, sculpted by these gadgets.

Learning Outcomes:

Learners recognize that the cognitive skill of synthesizing subsumes several others, viz. comprehending, analysing, making connections, drawing inferences, and combining all these into a complex system of knowledge.

Learners realize that this requires a high level of thinking, which has to be consciously cultivated until it gets integrated into the process, and once achieved it would enable them to formulate new perspectives.

Further Reading:

When any text is read, one needs to move beyond mere comprehension to identify connections with others and to synthesize them on a regular basis. This would shape up one to 'deep-read'.

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*Synthesizing: This is an advanced level of abstract thinking and hence, requires conscious practice till it gets embedded into one's thinking habit. Synthesizing is a critical skill for researchers who have to summarize concisely from different sources as part of their literature review and connect them to their research area.

According to Bloom's taxonomy, this is one of the higher order thinking skills and many find it an uphill task to reach that level. Hence, (pedagogic) strategies have to be put in place to enable learners to realize the skill.

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