SCORE – The Coach Approach to Demand Reading

Sue Hamilton-Smith, Pam Gargett, Julia Shaw, Kay Brodie, Chris Faix, Carmel Harrison and Susan Galletly | National Partnership Literacy Coaches, Department of Education and Training, Central Queensland Region

ABSTRACT

In this article seven literacy coaches from Queensland describe a strategy for middle years children that supports independent reading comprehension and test response. The strategy came about as a result of needs identified by classroom teachers to better prepare their students for testing situations such as NAPLAN. The strategy is called SCORE which stands for Skim and Scan, Connect and Question, Organise your Thinking, Read and Reflect and be the Expert. Literacy coaches are encouraging teachers to use this strategy in their classrooms and this has resulted in the generation of much professional conversation around reading and particularly the rigours of reading on demand.

Background

At the end of 2009, seven newly-appointed Literacy Coaches (part of the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership schools initiative) embarked on a week of professional development to enhance their roles in Mackay (Queensland) district schools. As Literacy coaches, directed to focus on reading instruction practices, their brief was to ‘work with teachers, for teachers, from the classroom out’ (Sheehan, 2009). From their interactions with practising classroom teachers at various schools, a pressing need was becoming universally evident to teachers and, subsequently to the coaches.

Despite the best efforts of classroom teachers, anecdotal observations were showing that many students were ill-prepared for multiple choice, multi-text, timed, challenging, demand-reading situations. Although they were usually operating as competent readers, many students often appeared to ‘spin their wheels’ when confronted with testing situations such as the NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) tests.

As a result of these classroom observations, and to be able to better prepare students for such situations, the group of coaches devised a strategy called SCORE – The Coach Approach to Demand Reading. The SCORE strategy provides a schema that supports a reader to independently comprehend and respond to text.

Schemata, or mental models, as suggested by Piaget (1926), ‘assist in our interpretation of the world and prediction of situations occurring in our environment. They develop over time and represent frameworks that use general concepts stored in long-term memory to help us make meaning out of situations’ (Sousa, 2005, p. 52). The SCORE strategy (or sequence of actions) aims to create strategic readers (Pressley, 2006, p. 18), bridging the gap between sound classroom reading pedagogy and successful reading by students.

SCORE is streamlined by necessity to provide a simple mnemonic to guide a reader towards the independent and expert comprehension of any given text. SCORE focuses teacher and student attention towards a small repertoire of strategies that effective comprehenders use (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). SCORE provides a scaffold to ‘produce students who learn
to use and do use the strategies in a self-regulated fashion’ (Pressley, 2006, p.52) within the context of a rich and motivating literacy program, guided by the range and balance of the Four Resources Model (Luke & Freebody, 1999) and that attends to the development of a student’s fluency, vocabulary and world knowledge. It aims to facilitate the development of an expert reader by working on the necessary skills. As stated by Hirsch (2003, p. 13), ‘a big difference between an expert and a novice in any field – is the ability to take in basic features very fast, thereby leaving the mind free to concentrate on important features’. Novice and some competent readers are yet to develop this ability. Their engagement with text is thereby slowed, especially in demanding situations.

SCORE leads students towards the internalisation of reading strategies by inviting their active participation in the reading process. SCORE demands that the reader annotate the focus text, or ‘read with a pencil’, a strategy called ‘Inking Your Thinking’ (Donnelly, 2007). This ‘marking up’ of text is a useful process for reading independence. It is a handy skill that promotes purposeful and effective reading in the classroom, encourages active student engagement in a wide range of reading practices across many classroom contexts and provides classroom evidence of students’ reading (Johns, 2009). If it is not appropriate to mark up a text directly, students use sticky labels, acetate overlays or the option in their word processing program.

The SCORE sequence is weighted towards pre-reading strategies that tap into prior learning and past experiences. Before a student is asked to read closely and to demonstrate their expertise, they are encouraged to take several steps to access and utilise their prior knowledge. The importance of this step is highlighted by Fogarty (1999, pp. 18–19), ‘when teachers stress pre-learning strategies with their students, increased student achievement is the result’.

SCORE – the strategy
SCORE is an easily remembered mnemonic that has connections to reader’s prior knowledge from sporting activities. It also has connotations of achieving well as in ‘a good score’. Several practitioners have used sporting analogies in their classrooms when introducing the strategy. Links have also been made to NAPLAN ‘scores’ and using SCORE to help the reader score well when necessary in a reading-based task.

**S – Skim and Scan**

**C – Connect and question**

**O – Organise your thinking**

**R – Read and Reflect**

**E – be the Expert**

S – Skim and Scan
The research of Pressley & Afflerbach (1995) confirms that good readers gain an overview of a text even before reading. This is supported by Sousa (2005, p. 53) who states that ‘teachers of reading should consider using strategies that activate the student’s prior knowledge, thus enabling them to better understand the text’. According to Armbruster (1996, pp. 253–276) effective strategies include reading the heading and titles and examining the visuals in the text and making predictions based on the title and visuals.

The SCORE sequence explicates that we read differently, at different times, for different purposes. SCORE begins with skim reading, browsing and glancing over the text to gain a general idea of what it is about. Attention is given to the title, headings and visuals, including the layout of the text. TV (titles and visuals) is a handy acronym used. The reader also
scans the text quickly to pick out specific information. Key words such as ‘compared with’, ‘problem’ or ‘effect’ that signal a text’s meaning structure are highlighted. The first stage of the SCORE sequence only takes seconds, but sets the reader up for future success. The information gleaned by skimming and scanning is matched with what is already known, questions are asked of the text, predictions begin to be made and meaning unlocked.

C – Connect and Question
Reading is about engaging with a text (Ewing, 2006). After skimming and scanning, SCORE asks readers to connect emotionally with the text. Students access their prior knowledge of the world and understanding of genre to make a personal decision about the worth of the text. They quickly draw an emoticon icon that best represents their feelings: a smile to show that an aspect of the text is agreeable, a straight-mouthed face for indifference or indecision and a sad face to indicate some form of displeasure with the type of text or its content. Students are asked to make a call and, as long as they justify their response, with evidence from the text, no assessment can be wrong. This simple process is supportive and ensures that the reading of this text has become personal.

Good readers are extremely active as they read (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). They connect with and question the text. SCORE asks the reader to further engage with the text by accessing their prior learning in the subject areas to predict a topic that will be confirmed by later close reading. The reader is asked to label the text, using the context clues gathered from skimming and scanning to assign a genre and to predict the text’s purpose, audience and possible author. Dare & Polias (2004, p. 16) define genre as ‘any staged, goal oriented, purposeful social activity which is accomplished through language. Genres which are valued and common in formal schooling contexts include recounts, descriptions, reports, narratives, arguments and discussions’.

O – Organise your Thinking
While Turner (1992) acknowledges that genre theory is a useful means of describing language use, texts do not always conform to predictable generic patterns. Top-level structures are thinking patterns which help to make sense of what is read, clued in by or at times working without clear genre organisation. In combination, genre and top-level structure are powerful schemata to promote and foster independence and self-managed learning. Sousa (2005, p. 52) adds that ‘schemata are important in helping us to comprehend text. Readers use their schemata to interpret cause and effect, to compare and contrast and to make inferences about the author’s meaning’.

At this stage of applying SCORE, the reader is guided by their predictions around subject and genre as well as identified words signalling comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution, description, list or sequence to impose a top-level structure on the text. There is no wrong answer, but comparison and cause and effect have proven their worth in helping to pinpoint an author’s main idea. A simple graphic such as a Venn diagram, t-bar or flow chart is marked on the text to assist in the organisation of thinking around the text’s predicted central message.

R – Read and Reflect
Students who have skimmed and scanned, connected, questioned and organised their thinking enter the close reading stage of SCORE with ‘relaxed alertness’ (Caine & Caine, 1994). An effective close reader has a game plan. They become a ‘text detective’, actively hunting through the text to confirm or discredit forecasts made when skimming and
scanning the title and visuals. They verify predictions made around topic, genre, audience, purpose and meaning organisation. The proficient close reader constructs mental images that represent ideas in the text. They continue to utilise prior knowledge together with evidence from the text to infer and to determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary. They monitor constantly, re-reading when meaning is unclear. Continued marking up of the text including underlining, highlighting, note-making and ticking confirmed predictions is verification that the close reader is focusing in on detail, reading carefully and making meaning.

Before succumbing to the rigours of having to demonstrate expertise, the reader pauses to reflect. They ensure that they have identified the main idea. They are confident that they can summarise the text. They are secure in the knowledge that they have a sense of the text and therefore can not be panicked or sidetracked by off-putting reading assessment practices.

E – Be the Expert

There are innumerable ways that we ask our students to demonstrate that they are expert readers of text. Daly (2006, p. 83) states that, ‘Assessment is an integral part of the reading program. It is most effective when it reflects the fact that learning is a complex process that is multi-dimensional, integrated and revealed in student performance over time’. Daly (2006) also reflects that ‘the biggest assessment task of all for teachers is to assess their students’ interests and backgrounds so that they can start from where students are at and make learning relevant and meaningful to them’.

State and national reading tests are designed to give some consistency of teacher judgement and accountability around educational programs and spending. They are a part of a balanced approach to reading assessment that includes formative, summative, authentic and self assessment and reflective practices. The Three Level Reading Guide (Morris & Stewart-Dore, 1984) is a useful schema to describe the levels of questioning, thinking and reasoning required when responding to text. The SCORE Coach Approach to Demand Reading sequence is a scaffold designed to help raise test scores, but, more importantly, to also guide, encourage and nurture expert readers who have the ability to ‘go beyond the author’s ideas to thoughts that are increasingly autonomous, transformative, and ultimately independent of the written text’ (Proust, cited in Wolf, 2007, p. 18).

SCORE in action

Solicited and unsolicited feedback from practitioners has been supportive of the adoption of the use of SCORE as an umbrella strategy in reading on demand situations. Following an ALEA ‘Literacy Heaven’ (local level professional development showcasing best practice) presentation of the use of SCORE and professional development offered to several school staff groups, SCORE has been trialled in many settings. Initial feedback is that the mnemonic is particularly useful as it is designed to be easily remembered by students as early as Year Two or Three.

In addition, several practitioners have offered feedback on several aspects of SCORE. These are currently under consideration by the coach group and are being adapted and used in class settings as warranted. The implementation of SCORE in the classroom has been supported by the development by the coaches of several resources. After much trial and error, an example of the resources commonly in use is included below.

Conclusion

One major benefit of the creation of SCORE has been the vast amount of professional conversation that has been generated following its implementation in various classes. It has
The Coach Approach to DEMAND READING

**Skim & Scan**

**Titles and text**
- Read with a pencil!

**Connect & Question**

**Ask:**
- How do I feel about this text?
  - 😊 😞 😞
- What do I know about this topic?
- What do I know about this text?
  - genre
  - audience
  - purpose
  - author

**Organise Your Thinking**

**Think** about your 'game plan'.
- Where am I at?
- What next?

**Predict** meaning organisation.
- Compare/Contrast
- Cause/Effect
- Sequence
- Problem/Solution
- Description

**Read & Reflect**

**Read** closely.
- Monitor meaning.
  - Visualise
  - Confirm thinking
- Retell. Identify main idea.

**Be the Expert**

**Apply** learning.
- Read question.
- Read responses.
- Shoot options at target.
- Revisit text to confirm.
- Choose and check.
provided a solid framework for discussion of reading in general and, more specifically, the rigours of reading on demand. Suggestions for modifications have been openly canvassed and debated enthusiastically. SCORE is presently being adapted and trialled as a cooperative learning strategy in several Mackay schools.

It is anticipated that these professional conversations will continue to arise at least until after the local results of the next NAPLAN reading tests are dissected. In this way, the value of the schema will have been practically and professionally put to the test.

References