Developing academic reading skills with Comprehension

Context

This is an academic reading course for teachers in training, aimed at sharpening their reading skills and training them on academic literature. Effective readers monitor their understanding, and when they lose the meaning of what they are reading, they often unconsciously select a reading strategy (such as rereading or asking questions) that will help them reconnect with the meaning of the text.

Within this academic reading course the teacher explores a new pedagogy. Students are asked to apply a more effective reading strategy in which they prime on predefined topics (by teachers) while they are reading.

The FeedbackFruits Comprehension tool is set up in such a way that it supports the process of focusing on topics during both individual text analysis as subsequently in a collaborative learning experience.

Constructive alignment

Learning objectives

- Students are able to identify the structure and comprehend the main arguments of academic papers.
- Students are able to restate and summarize the meaning of text in one’s own words.

Learning activities

Students have to read a paper. For a report or research paper, students first read the abstract. Students may also find it useful to read the conclusion in full. If a section of the paper is short, students read it in full. If it is long, they read the first sentence of each paragraph. Skimming for the most important sentence will give students an overview of the main content of each passage. In the tool, the students see the topics that are central to the text. The task is to identify the passages that relate to each of these topics, annotate these relevant passages and optionally summarize multiple annotations. The annotations made by students are used to fuel an in-class discussion.

These learning activities address the following levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy:

- **Understand** - Individually assess and identify the structure of academic papers.
- **Analyze** - Critically read and analyze the sections and annotate the main arguments
- **Evaluate** - Reflect and comment on peers annotations, give feedback and engage into a discussion.
Assessment of learning outcomes

- The instructor randomly assesses the quality of inline comments on annotations. The placement of the annotations revealed whether the students could identify the structure.

Quote from the instructor

“The tool provided a medium to activate unengaged/shy learners to participate and give relevant input.”

Notable outcomes

- The tool provided a medium to activate unengaged/shy learners to participate and give relevant input.
- It was noted that compared to the old scenario, without the Comprehension assignment, the interactivity between students increased and the students had a more indepth in-class discussion.
- Creating too many topics per document would generally lead to two undesirable outcomes: 1) a high workload for the learners and 2) a cluttered overview of annotations.
- A maximum of 4-5 topics are therefore considered more suitable for this activity.
- Because it was optional for students to write an explanation about the annotations they made, the instructors could ensure that any comments were of high quality.

The role of the instructor

- The instructor gives detailed instructions on how to effectively read the paper and gives a small demonstration of how the tool works.
- The instructor determines the topics that are to be annotated by students.
- After students have been reading and annotating the paper individually, the instructor enables collaborative viewing - letting students see each other’s annotations - to discuss the paper during class. The instructor mediates this in-class discussion.
- When evaluating whether students were well prepared, the instructor chose not to check every one of the students’ annotations. Instead, the preparedness of students was evaluated by how they participated in the overall class discussion.

Added value of technology

- Using Comprehension engaged students and increased the preparation before class.
- The annotations students made online provided valuable input for in-class discussion.
- Because students were able to view each other’s annotations, it was not just an individual learning experience. This transformed it into a collaborative learning activity.

Possible variation

By creating multiple smaller group assignments for the collaborative part (up to 10 students in a group) collaborative learning is more likely to take place, otherwise the document can become too cluttered.