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### Effects of self-questioning instruction on students' interpretation and appreciation of short stories

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**Publication date**  
2009

**Published in**  
Fostering Communities of Learners: digital book of abstracts

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Janssen, T., & Braaksma, M. (2009). Effects of self-questioning instruction on students' interpretation and appreciation of short stories. In G. Rijlaarsdam (Ed.), *Fostering Communities of Learners: digital book of abstracts* Graduate School for Teaching and Learning, UvA. <http://www.earli2009.org/bookofabstracts/start.html>

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Amsterdam 2009 | Fostering Communities of Learners | August 25-29

## **SESSION**

F 3 | 26 August 2009 | 13:30 - 15:00

room: A-Tower Level 7 - Room 02

Paper Presentation

category: Conceptual Change

Conceptual change

### **participants**

- chairperson: Wim Van Dooren, Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

### **Effects of self-questioning instruction on students' interpretation and appreciation of short stories**

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The aim of this study was to examine the effects of instruction in self-questioning on students' interpretation and appreciation of complex short stories. Two experiments were carried out, in which tenth grade students from different secondary schools participated. In Experiment 1 self-questioning instruction was compared to instructor-made questions about stories. In Experiment 2 two forms of self-questioning instruction were compared; an unguided and a guided form. Results showed that self-questioning positively affected students' appreciation of literary stories, compared to instructor-prepared questions. The results for quality of interpretation were more diffuse. In Experiment 1 effects on students' story interpretation could not be established. In Experiment 2 an effect on story interpretation was found for both the guided and unguided form of self-questioning instruction. Avid readers tended to benefit the most from unguided self-questioning instruction. We conclude that an open literature approach, based on authentic student-generated questions in response to short stories, can be beneficial for students' story interpretation and appreciation.

### **Summary**

Students often lack motivation for reading and studying literature at school, especially in the higher grades of secondary education (Van Schooten, 2005). One of the reasons could be that students - novices in the field of literature - are confronted with complex, ambiguous literary texts, which are explained to them by the teacher. Often, students are not stimulated to think for themselves; they are expected to find 'right' answers to the teacher's questions and to search for deeper layers of meaning the teacher has in mind. In Dutch secondary education, this approach to literature appears to be the default (Janssen, 1996).

Instead of answering teacher questions, students may be stimulated to actively interact with the text by engaging in questioning during and after reading. Previous intervention studies have shown that generating questions can be an effective reading strategy, for study texts and other expository genres (see for reviews: Rosenshine, Meister & Chapman, 1996; Wong, 1985). Questioning also seems appropriate for ambiguous literary stories (Janssen, 2002). Think aloud studies indicate that good adolescent readers ask significantly more questions in response to short literary stories than weak student-readers in the same age group (Janssen, Braaksma & Rijlaarsdam, 2006).

In this study we examined whether instruction in self-questioning could be beneficial for students' interpretation and appreciation of complex short stories. Our research questions were:

- 1) Which instructional approach is more effective; self-questioning or responding to instructor-made questions?
- 2) Which type of self-questioning instruction is more effective; with or without guidance in self-questioning?

Two experiments were carried out, in which tenth grade students from different secondary schools in The Netherlands and Belgium participated. In both studies we used a pretest-posttest-control group design. In Experiment 1 we compared self-questioning instruction to instructor-made questions about short stories. Students of different schools were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the self-questioning condition students (N = 35) were stimulated to generate their own personal questions about stories, in the other condition (N = 32) we presented instructor-made questions about the same stories. The questions were discussed in small groups.

In Experiment 2 two different forms of self-questioning instruction were compared; an unguided and a guided form. Ten whole classes of five different schools participated (N = 245). In the unguided condition (5 classes), students were stimulated to generate and discuss their own questions about stories, without receiving any guidelines for specific question types. In the guided condition (5 classes) students were also stimulated to generate and discuss their own questions, but – in addition – received good and weak examples of student questions and responses to stories. Students were asked to reflect on these examples.

At pre- and post-test students read and responded to short stories. Students' appreciation of these stories were measured with a questionnaire. Students' written story interpretations were rated for quality by panels of independent judges on a three point scale (ranging from 1, weak to 3, good). Reliability scores were sufficient (Cronbachs alpha .72 - .83).

Results showed that self-questioning positively affected students' appreciation of literary stories, compared to instructor-prepared questions. The effect size was medium (ES .68). The results for quality of interpretation were more diffuse. In Experiment 1 we could not establish effects of treatment on students' story interpretation due to measurement problems. In Experiment 2 an effect on story interpretation was found for both the guided and unguided form of self-questioning instruction. Students who received self-questioning instruction without any guidance outperformed students who had reflected on examples of student questions, in 'depth' of story interpretations. The effect size was small (ES .42). Avid readers tended to benefit more from unguided self-questioning than from guided self-questioning instruction. For infrequent readers both forms of instruction were equally effective. A crucial question is whether students did indeed learn to use a self-questioning

strategy in response to short stories, and whether they applied that strategy more frequently at posttest than at pretest. In Experiment 1, we collected think aloud responses to stories at pre- and posttest, which were analysed for the reading activities the students used during reading (Janssen et al., 2006). Results showed that students more often engaged in questioning during reading at the posttest than at pretest. In the condition with self generated student questions, almost all students (94 %) increased their number of questions during reading between pretest and posttest. In the condition with instructor-made questions, about half of the students (46 %) showed such an increase.

In Experiment 2, students wrote down their initial responses to stories in the margins. From these responses it turned out that students asked more questions at posttest than at pretest. About 58 % of the students (in both conditions) increased the number of their questions in initial response to stories. These findings suggest that most students had indeed learned to use the self-questioning strategy in response to short stories. We conclude that an open literature approach, based on authentic student-generated questions in response to short stories, can be beneficial for students' story interpretation and appreciation. The findings of our study have implications for the development of instructional strategies aimed at enhancing students' literary understanding.

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