

Do the TOCfE Thinking Processes provide surplus value when applied during the lessons in ‘comprehensive reading’?

Introduction

- From March until October 2012 the three Thinking Processes of TOC for Education have been offered by me during an 18 hour pilot project to 10 elementary school teachers. I first translated Kathy Suerken’s workbook: **The TOC Learning Connection: Critical Thinking Tools to Analyze, Interpret and Apply Curriculum** into Dutch.
- For every chapter the 6 contact hours were divided into two Wednesday afternoons of three hours each. After each first session of a chapter the teachers applied the TP in their classrooms: first the Logic Branch, then the Cloud and finally the Ambitious Target. They sent in ‘homework’ and gave short presentations to each other during the first hour of the second session of each tool.
- The teachers found the TOCfE Thinking tools very useful when working with texts which needed to be interpreted and analyzed. But they hesitated to apply TOCfE during the special weekly 45 minute lesson in ‘comprehensive reading’.
- The method the school uses for the subject ‘comprehensive reading’ offers a central theme (as far as I have seen) in every chapter and is designed to develop vocabulary, specific expressions or so-called ‘pay attention!-words’. Every chapter has extensive instructions for the teacher while the students have their own workbooks.
- The team challenged me to demonstrate that TOCfE might have surplus value when applied in these lessons as well.

In fact the teacher’s hesitation to apply TOCfE during these specific lessons could be considered a conflict:

The Cloud

If you are not familiar with TOC, please see next page how to read this cloud

The test scores for comprehensive reading are disappointing
Apparently the present approach is not sufficient
The outcome compared to the time and effort that has been put in needs to be a lot higher
.....

ASSUMPTIONS

*Students learn to analyse the text in a logical way
Students learn to think logically for themselves
The text is going to be relevant
Students learn to draw conclusions for themselves
Students see the connections and are able to remember the text a lot easier
TOC enhances independent learning and thinking
It will make comprehensive reading more fun and relevant*

COMMON GOAL

A
Teach students to read well

NEED

B
Provide students with more thinking tools

WANT/ACTION

D
Apply TOC during comprehensive reading lessons

C
Stick to the given instructions of the comprehensive reading method

D'
Not apply TOC during comprehensive reading lessons

School did chose this method carefully
Another teacher has to be able to continue the lessons without any extra instructions
.....

*Students only need to learn the specific assignments of each chapter of the method.
Method is only meant to develop reading skills and vocabulary
The assignments in a text are sufficiently extensive by themselves
We have only 45 minutes and applying TOCfE takes too much time
TOCfE is more useful for analytical reading and for behavior issues than for comprehensive reading*

How to read a conflict diagram (the Cloud)

Read from left to right and start with box A:

At the one hand:

In order to have A I need to have B and in order to have B I need to have/do D, BECAUSE

At the other hand:

In order to have A I need to have C and in order to have C I need ot have/do D
BECAUSE

So in this conflict: At the one hand:

A in order to teach students to read well, B I need to give them more tools and B in order to give them more tools, D I need to apply TOCfE, BECAUSE: see the possible explanations/assumptions in the boxes between A-B and B-D

At the other hand:

A in order to teach students to read well C I need to stick with the instructions in the method and C in order to stick with the instructions D' I am not going to apply TOCfE, BECAUSE: see possible explanations/assumptions in the lower boxes between A-C and C-D

The text

The text the teachers gave me comes from a textbook of the 4th grade reading level.

It is a rather silly story of a merchant ('the mud man') who goes from street to street with a little stall where he sells mud. He claims the mud cures all kinds of problems.

Some people believe him, and buy a clot of mud, others laugh about it and make a mock of him.

Elaboration of a lesson in ‘comprehensive reading’

a. the instructions for the teacher

First I studied the teacher instructions. They covered two pages, which a teacher had underlined in pencil in different places to keep track.

Additional TOCfE action: I reasoned that it would be easier and more readable to put the instructions into a schedule. The schedule could be projected onto the Digiboard for the whole class to see.

Effect: instead of only the teacher, the whole class would know right away the purpose of this chapter. Since (as far as I could see) the working order in the different chapters looked the same, that schedule could be used for every chapter. The students would see the order (stepping stones) in every chapter and would be more involved in the lesson from the very beginning (more equality between teacher and students) So I put the instructions into the stepping stone schedule (see the next page).

In the yellow boxes you see the steps that need to be taken during the lesson, to the right is some additional information and to the left, in blue, you see the topics for this particular chapter about ‘the mud man’.

In TOC you start with the lowest box, going upwards: saying to yourself: first I need to do **a**, then **b** etc.... I suggested **c** to be put after **e** because then the words are dealt with within the context, but the teachers told me that that was not the way of the method (mmm...another conflict???)

Ambitious Target:
The chapter is fully understood

f. Answer the questions in your workbook

g. Evaluate the chapter

TOC

c. Difficult words:

The stall
Lubricate
The merchandise
Get into order
The clot

e. Read the text together

c.. What are the qualities of mud?

d. Get an impression of the text:
the title
illustrations

What kind of text is it?

-story
- poem
- 'know-text'

b. 'Pay-attention!-words'
(As) in a comparison
f.e. 'as black as soot'

a. Repeat:
'Pay-attention!-words'
indicating time (*then*)
and place (*there*)

b. Discuss the central part of this chapter

c. Discuss the difficult words in the text

a. Briefly discuss the last chapter
(Activate prior knowledge)

Elaboration of a lesson in ‘comprehensive reading’

b. analyzing the text

Additional TOCfE questions between box e and f of the schedule:

How has this text been put together? Make a Logic Branch.

Is it easy?

Does one step easily lead to the next?

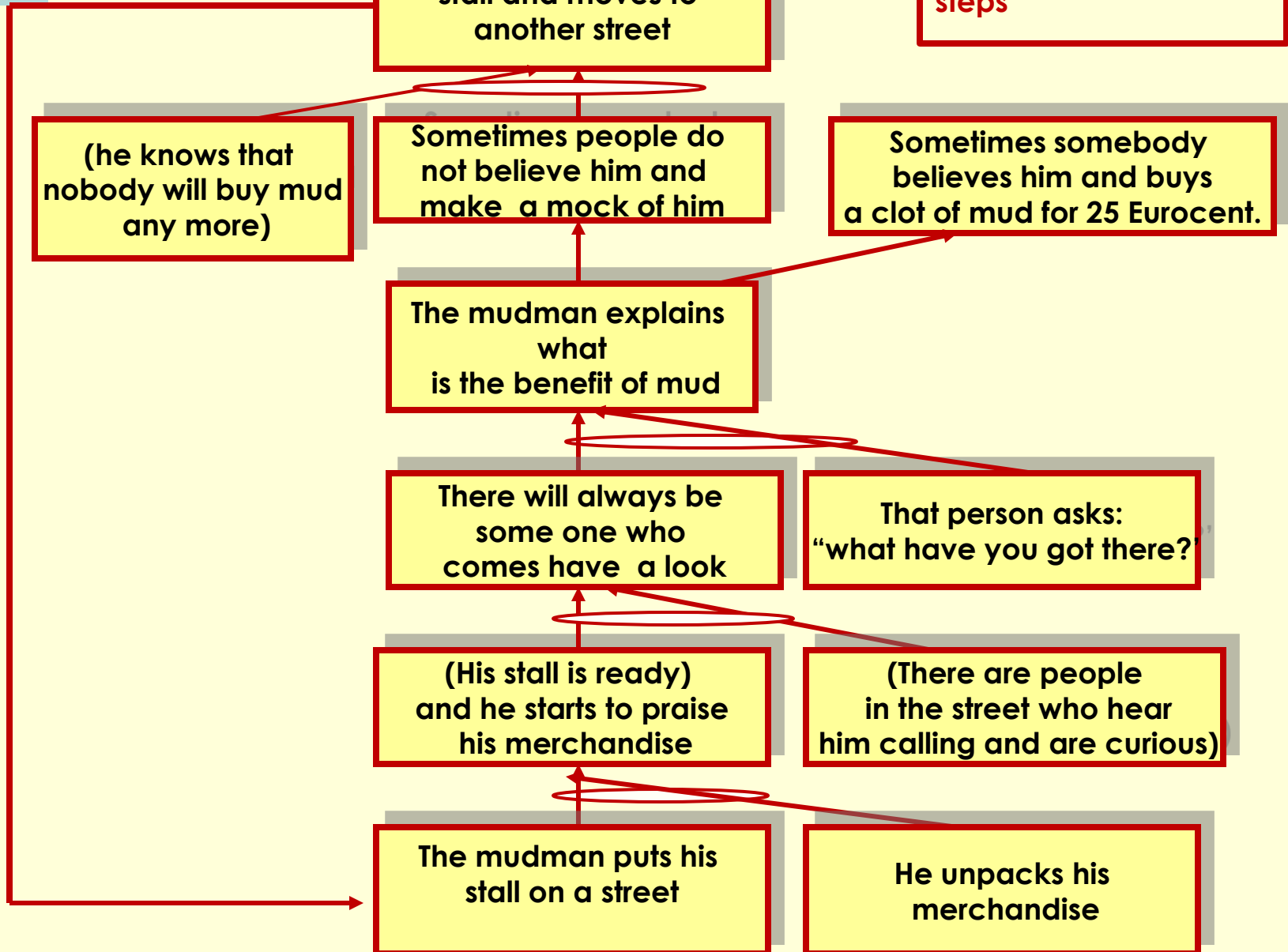
Can you find all the steps in the text? Or do you have to add steps from prior knowledge or from ‘reading between the lines’?

Effect: the context will be carefully analyzed, which will make it easier to remember, to retell and to evaluate the story.

The Logic Branch may look like this:.

(When the text in a box is put between brackets, it means that the words are not explicitly mentioned in the text, but could be read between the lines)

Logic Branch:
Put the text into logical steps



Elaboration of a lesson in ‘comprehensive reading’

c. evaluating the text

The students then answer the questions in their workbooks independently. In this particular chapter the questions are all about the central theme (comparison), about adjectives (the qualities of mud) and vocabulary + ‘Pay attention- words’.

Finally, the last question invites the students to give their opinion about the text. In the workbook it says: ‘For example: one student thought the story to be funny, another child was annoyed. What is your opinion?’

Additional TOCfE action: In stead of briefly discussing the answers: make the two stated opinions into a Cloud and write down the assumptions of all students on both sides.

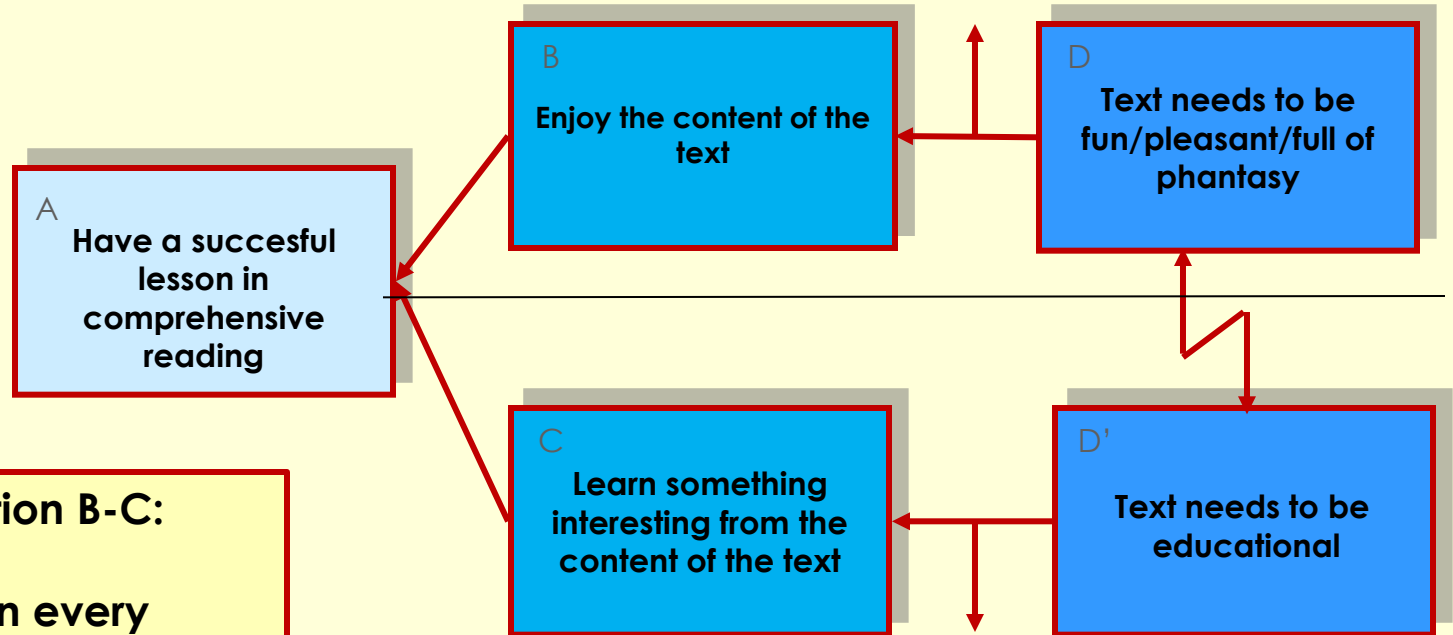
Effect: the class has a visual picture of the conflict and of the opinion of every class mate. It will mean more involvement and gives a possibility to find a solution that meets the needs of B and C.

That cloud might look like this:

The Cloud

ASSUMPTIONS

I like to laugh about a story
I love phantasy stories
It is easier to remember when the text is fun
It makes practising vocabulary easier and more fun
I like funny illustrations, it helps me enjoy the text more



Possible solution B-C:

Find a topic in every chapter that relates to the life experience of the students

Who wants to sell or to buy MUD!
It should not be such an unreal story
It has to be about something that could really happen
I would rather read a text about animals or history
I find it boring if it's only about vocabulary and Pay-attention!-words

Elaboration of a lesson in 'comprehensive reading'

d. demonstration of the relevance of the text for the students

Possible solution **B-C: Find a topic in every chapter that relates to the life experience of the students**

Additional TOCfE question:

In the text is mentioned that some people believe the mud man and buy the mud while others don't believe the mud man and make a mock of him.

Can you explain why somebody would buy mud? What would that person think? And what would the person think who decides not to buy it?

The answers could be put into another Cloud:

The Cloud

ASSUMPTIONS

*Sales man has a convincing story
The man deserves to earn his money some way
Other products did not work, perhaps this one does
I see that others buy it
It is not expensive, if it does not work, I have not lost much
.....*

*It is my money and I can
spend it any way I want
I love to buy things on
impulse and for fun and
feel carefree*

A
Come back home happy
with the merchandise I
have bought

*It has been on my wish list
for a long time
I compared many different
products
I saved up money for it*

B
Buy impulsively, or for
fun, or just for the
sake of spending
money

D
Buy this product

C
Buy what I need

D'
Not buy this product

*I have already similar products at home
I can spend my money only once
I don't need it at this moment
It is not what I have been looking for
It is not on my shopping list
.....*

(continued)

d. demonstration of the relevance of the text for the students

Additional TOCfE question:

Look again at the last Cloud. It is about other people buying something or not buying something.

How about you? Did you ever buy something on impulse? Did you regret it afterwards?

Did you ever save up money for something you wanted?

How do you react:

to commercials on TV,

to all the candy and other small attractive items at the counter in the supermarket,

to friends who have got some gadget and you want that too?

Effect: the students learn that in any text there can be found a topic, a conflict, a (negative) branch that may refer to their own life experience.

Conclusion

The team agreed that I did demonstrate that there would be a surplus value by applying TOCfE in the lessons in 'comprehensive reading' They also agreed that it would make the content of the text more relevant for the students.

HOWEVER...

Their Obstacles to not apply TOCfE (see the cloud on page 2) have not been taken away. They stay the same:

- ***Students only need to learn the specific assignments of each chapter of the method.***
- ***Method is specifically meant to develop reading skills and vocabulary.***
- ***The assignments in a text are sufficiently extensive by themselves.***
- ***We have only 45 minutes a week and applying TOCfE takes too much extra time. We will not be able to finish the book on time.***

Of course I could suggest all kinds of solutions to break this conflict B-C of page 2, using the CLR's to question the assumptions. But as we know, those solutions in TOCfE have to come from the teachers themselves. I do hope, however, that by giving them this presentation, I have also given them cause to reconsider their assumptions. An e-mail of one of the teachers does suggest that already!

Postscript

The Ambitious Target: **students have very high scores for ‘comprehensive reading’** is very dear to me. As this school team has seen and experienced: TOCfE can be applied from Kindergarten until 8th Grade!

The teachers agreed that application of TOCfE has been a wonderful asset and welcome addition to their teaching skills. They do apply the TP’s often with texts which need to be analyzed, interpreted or when students need to form an opinion. Besides it has been very helpful outside the curriculum to solve behavioral issues.

To me it is still rather a contradiction in terminology, that TOCfE will not be applied during ‘comprehensive reading’ lessons. When I started this little research, I did not know that ‘comprehensive reading’ is not just the equivalent for a ‘full understanding of any text,’ but a special method which is used once a week for 45 minutes.

There are separate steps in the reading process: the first one is called ‘technical reading’(content is not relevant, it’s just about ‘making miles’ in reading, related to the reading level of the students). The second step is called ‘comprehensive reading’ (the text is used to learn words and language skills) and the third step is called ‘analytical reading’ in which the content will be critically analyzed. **I hoped that TOCfE would help close the gap between those steps, making ANY reading text relevant for critical thinking. By splitting up reading in these three distinctive levels it may take a few years before the children learn to connect reading skills to thinking skills. By that time many may have lost interest in reading at all, at least that is my experience.**

Unfortunately my time with this wonderful team is up. They were absolutely amazing and I would have loved to continue the discussion and get more examples of their application of TOCfE in their classes. I am deeply grateful for the exchange and hope, that the 18 hours were sufficient for the team to continue their good work. They do have Kathy Suerken’s fantastic workbook, which is giving them step by step instructions, in all three Thinking Processes, so they can always refer to and rely on that for support. Or they can call/e-mail me.

I wish them all the success in the world and thank them for the way they have given their time and energy to this pilot-project. I have learned a lot myself as well and have been stimulated to continue on this path.

Beek, november 2012

Petra Pouw-Legêne

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