

# **Developing Effective College Reading Behaviors:**

## ***How Do Students' Approaches to Reading Affect Their Success?***

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Students come to college with a variety of levels of awareness about how one makes meaning from print. Many students who are not prepared for college level reading fall into the categories of those who either do not take college preparatory classes in the first place, do not develop the needed skills the first time they have a chance, or do not enter college immediately after high school learning takes place (Wyatt, 2003). In addition, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, English language learners, reluctant readers, students with learning disabilities, and poor test takers need additional preparation to meet the demands of reading in college level courses. However, all students who make the transition from high school to college can benefit from instruction in strategies for making meaning from text to prepare for a variety of activities such as discussions, writing, and exams. College learning requires that students understand and remember what they mean with less support and guidance than what was provided in the high school setting (Simpson & Nist, 2002). First-year college students in particular need some support in transitioning to an increase in reading material and higher expectations for making meaning from the material independently. Even advanced students benefit from instruction in reading and study strategies as reading at the college level is dense and challenging for all students (Wyatt, 2003). College students develop effective reading behaviors through

experience using strategies that teach reading as an interactive process during which students monitor their comprehension and adjust the strategy to fit the text and task (Simpson & Nist, 2003).

Students' perceptions of themselves as readers are essential to their success in college. A reading strategy for college level material must help students to find and identify themselves as confident, capable readers that are motivated to read and learn. Reading instruction that is meaningful to all students and can be modified for use at their current level of skill is most effective (Simpson & Nist, 2003). At the postsecondary level, most of our students have mastered decoding skills and can read college level texts but need strategies to move into higher levels of comprehension, application, and synthesis. First, students must have awareness of strategies in order to find making meaning from text engaging and meaningful so that they can focus on a task sustainably to practice strategies that improve their engagement and comprehension. The affective aspects of an approach to reading such as generating interest and self-efficacy are just as essential as the skills. Students' schemata for reading include not only their knowledge about the reading process, but also their feelings associated with reading experiences (Weaver 2002). Therefore, it is important to help students have positive experiences making meaning from texts in order to increase their self-efficacy with these types of reading activities. Next, strategies for increasing interactivity between the student reader and the text during the reading process can be applied. These include steps for before reading to set up a framework for reading with purpose through previewing, prediction, and questioning; during reading to interact with the text by questioning, predicting, connecting, and evaluating information in the text; and after

reading strategies to review and reflect upon what was read. Students must have these transactions with the text in order to create personal meaning (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Reading requires more than skills to synthesize learning from text. Application of these comprehension skills is not likely to occur without the ability to generate interest, purpose, interaction, and control as a reader. Students need to have experience in how to generate interest and purpose, value their personal interactions with a text, and feel confident in their ability to create meaning as they read, similar to the way they would read high-interest texts such as popular magazines, Internet blogs, or other materials they feel successful and confident while reading and from which they naturally apply strategies to make their own meaning.

A student's perception of learning as an interactive process rather than passive activity is essential to their level of engagement and comprehension. Reading is a complicated process that requires awareness of several components all at once. Reading instruction has gone from a largely mechanical and perceptual focus to more of a constructivist focus which considers many elements of the highly complex process of comprehension (Pearson and Stephens, 1992). A student can be expected to need experience in putting all the pieces together to become fully aware of all that is required in the reading process. Reading and study skills models should include teaching task and strategy awareness; however, it is also important to share the theory behind the strategies and processes (Simpson & Nist, 2003). The traditional notion of teaching reading involves exposure to a variety of texts and teaching students to use a variety of strategies to make meaning from these texts, but students must also be aware of the ways the strategies work and encouraged to develop metacognitive awareness for self-

regulation (VanBlerkom, 2010). If shown how to monitor their attention, evaluate their comprehension, and make adjustments when needed, students will become better readers across the curriculum. Educators should foster deep levels of processing and also explain the theories behind the strategies so that students may better understand the reading process as well as themselves as readers (Simpson & Nist, 2003).

Students benefit from a close examination and development of their personal theories of learning. This can be done by modeling strategies with explicit theories and then encouraging students to try the strategies and adapt them to their own personal use. A walk-through and an adaptable model can make all the difference when a student is struggling with low self-efficacy. Flexibility in the way a student completes an active reading or note taking activity can be essential when a student is grappling with the need for personal meaning and control over the reading process.

### ***What Strategies are appropriate for College Reading Strategy Instruction?***

The processes for active reading that benefit students the most are those that can help students become more aware of the metacognitive processes involved in effective reading. The two main aspects of metacognition are cognition and self-regulation (Simpson & Nist, 2002). Cognition is what readers know about their resources, differences in strategies for different texts and purposes, and selectivity of information (Mealy, 2003). Self-regulation involves readers in making evaluations and controlling their actions during reading. A strong sense of self-efficacy is acquired by personal effort and a sense of control over the task. Control is an integral part of both academic motivation and self-monitoring. The SQ3R, P2R, and Double-Entry

journal are reading strategy models that help students increase awareness of cognitive and self-regulation aspects of the reading process.

### ***SQ3R for Purpose and Focus with Non-Narrative Texts***

One of the most commonly taught reading strategies is the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) process for reading an article or textbook chapter (Stahl, King, & Eilers, 2003). SQ3R involves surveying the text for subject, generating questions from the section headings, reading actively to find relevant information, reciting the answers to the questions in students' own words, and then reviewing the main ideas to transfer it into long term memory. Students can choose to use this strategy for material that is challenging for them to help them focus their reading, condense the material, and repeat the main ideas. It is explicitly taught as a strategy for non-narrative texts and can be modified and/or abridged by students to suit their needs as they become more familiar with the process.

### ***P2R for Active Reading and Note-Taking Within a Text and Its Margins***

A strategy for helping students read and respond to ideas within their texts is the P2R (Preview, Read Actively, Review), which is a very similar process, but with methods that allow students to have more choices for active reading as they read (VanBlerkom, 2010). This strategy begins when a student previews the chapter headings and summary in order to get a sense of what the chapter is about and set-up a framework for making meaning. Then, students read actively by text-marking key terms definitions, important ideas and phrases; circling and/or coding ideas with symbols that are meaningful to them such as stars, exclamation points, arrows, etc; and

then writing summaries, questions, reactions, connections, and evaluations in the margins as they read. This strategy offers students a wide variety of methods to select, condense, and respond to information in order to make it meaningful. After reading, students can review their markings and annotations to review the material. This is a strategy that can be modified for use with non-narrative and narrative texts of any level. Some students adapt this strategy by using Post-it notes or index cards if they are unable to write in a text.

### ***Double-Entry Journal for a Variety of Text Interactions and Purposes***

Another versatile strategy is the double-entry journal. This activity is also useful with non-narrative and narrative texts as well as for research activities. This is a two-column graphic organizer in which students select and record information from the text in the left column and then write their text interactions in the right hand column (Poziemski, 2006). For non-narrative texts, students record important terms, meanings, main ideas, names, dates, and statistics from the text in the left column, and then record their connections, questions, further examples, reactions, and evaluations in the right column. For narrative texts, students can record elements of the story such as information about characters, plot, conflict, theme, tone, and significant quotes in the left column, and their reactions, predictions, connections, questions, and evaluations in the column on the right column. Students must learn to value their responses and interpretation of texts in order to see themselves as skilled readers (Simpson & Nist, 2003). Making reading personal and synthesizing one's own meaning is effective in feeling ownership of the reading process. In order to be engaged in any type of text, a student should always be aware of the construction of a personal meaning; they should

feel empowered to "bring it home" to their own set of experiences any time they approach a text. The types of information taken from the text vary based on the text type and the purpose for reading.

### ***Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Processes Across Disciplines***

Metacognitive awareness of the reading process helps students prepare for effective reading across all content areas. Cognition is an important aspect of these strategies because students become aware of a variety of ways to read actively and must learn to select the one that suits their learning styles and the task most appropriately. Then, while reading, students must apply selectivity to decide which material is important to mark, record, and/or respond to. Self-regulation is also an important part of these strategies as students control the strategy they will use, how the strategy will be used, and how they respond to that information. These strategies work well to get students more engaged in their reading and to help show them some tools to use in developing their own approach to reading their assigned texts. Intelligence is not a key factor in any areas of developmental needs exhibited in our students. Students need opportunities to develop metacognitive awareness which will in turn increase their motivation (Wyatt 2003). Use of strategies such as SQ3R, P2R, and Double-Entry journals fosters understanding of the reading process and control over the outcome, which in turn increase students' self-efficacy and motivation. In order to make the transition from high school to college, students need to develop strategies for reading and making meaning from college level texts in all content areas, which will lead to increase in fulfillment of personal goals, greater retention, and higher graduation rates (Weinstein et. al., 2003). If students are to be successful in college, they need to

understand the process of reading and monitor their own learning. Providing strategies for first-year students is essential to help students adapt the strategies to their own learning needs and develop their own techniques. Colleges should not wait until a student is struggling in their courses to provide the tools needed for skilled learning. The impact of providing reading support to help students understand themselves as learners for post-secondary success will continue to have a large impact on the retention and graduation rate of students overall, especially at-risk students. After all, an underprepared student does not equal an unable student (Wyatt, 2003). Colleges just need to show all students the way early on rather than promoting a sink or swim philosophy as every student who swims is a success for all who strive for a democratic society.

### ***Using Technology to Support Reading Strategy Instruction***

Students will be entering college needing to be increasingly effective and efficient in reading (Caverly, 2003). Technology can be used to provide explicit strategy instruction, extensive practice, student choice, and transfer of skills. These applications of technology such as the Effective Reading Behavior Tutorials created using Articulate software can be a tool of support to further promote what reading teachers know about quality instruction and effective strategies. Students can access an overview that explains how they can transfer the skills they use to yield high comprehension for high interest reading to increase self efficacy. Then, students can access interactive tutorials for reading strategies in which they can control the content and rate according to their own needs. Pedagogy must precede technology,

technological delivery tools can be powerful supports when used to develop comprehension, transaction with text, and motivation for reading (Caverly.)

"The Effects of Computer Instruction on College Students' Reading Skills" by V. Alison Keuhner (Stahl & Boylan, 2003) shows that college freshmen using computer aided instruction to learn comprehension skills showed gains of 1 to 2 years in grade level reading over the course of the semester. Keuhner's summary of the research in this area suggests that practice time is the most significant indicator rather than delivery mode; however, if students feel engaged and encouraged and in more control while using interactive computer tutorials, they are more likely to spend more time using these patient and responsive tutors. Students in these studies demonstrated a strongly positive attitude towards applications in which a computer tutorial modeled and taught students effective reading strategies and students appreciated the privacy and availability of this individualized mode of instruction. Although computerized tutorials are not a replacement of classroom instruction, they do serve as an effective support and can be utilized to engage students who enjoy using technology, especially when other approaches have not been successful. These multimedia tutorials have great promise in the field as they can be shared amongst instructors and institutions quite easily for a far-reaching impact on student success.

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