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## TEACHING READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS: A FRAMEWORK FOR INCREASING LEARNING

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Participants in inservice courses may not be the most enthusiastic students since they are often enrolled to meet a school district requirement. If, indeed, the prerequisite for enrollment in such a course were previous methods courses in reading, the number of enrollees would be quite limited. Content teachers simply may not have had the desirable background methods courses in reading during their undergraduate training in the content fields (Morrison and Austin, 1977) to aid them in acquiring the essential behaviors necessary to teach students how to use effective strategies for understanding text.

The ramifications of this limitation are more serious for some inservice teachers than others. Some teachers seem to realize intuitively that effective reading skills are critical to students' success in content subjects while others do not indicate such knowledge. Those who realize this need to hone their skills to facilitate meeting student needs.

Shannon (1984) describes the desirable teaching behaviors for the content area classroom teacher as:

1. Sensitivity to the readability of materials;
2. Preparation for reading;
3. The use of reading in the content areas;
4. Outside reading (supplementary reading);
5. Knowledge of principles of reading in the content areas (p. 129).

It should be noted that each of these behaviors should be included as components of theory and practice in reading methods courses. However, one course in the teaching of reading in the content areas is generally insufficient to train preservice teachers in effective reading instruction.

Educators Askov and Dupuis (1979) suggest that content area teachers who may be well-versed in their subject areas frequently experience difficulty individualizing instruction and facilitating direct instruction of reading skills essential to effective comprehension of text. There is evidence that direct instruction enhances learning and is effective (Hansen and Pearson, 1983; Raphael and McKinney, 1983; Raphael and Pearson, 1982; Reis and Spekman, 1983; Tharp, 1982). A body of teacher effectiveness research confirms that students learn when they are taught under the directiveness of the teacher (Bauman, 1984; Blair, 1984).

Phelps (1984) states that content area teachers readily accept the functional value of strategies and resources presented to them in such a course as described in this article and are quite willing to try new ideas with guidance. Most authorities agree that the difficulties that students experience in content subjects are usually due to limited reading skills. Current research on teaching indicates that effective teachers must be able to explain and model the skills and strategies that they want students to be able to demonstrate (Spring, 1985). In addition, content area teachers must develop the necessary background knowledge to facilitate modeling for students the processes involved in comprehension tasks.

This article describes four guidelines which have been found effective in helping content area teachers to develop the necessary skills to enhance learning in the content areas. The instructional practices cited are characteristic of those used by effective teachers and recommended by researchers. The steps include: 1) Needs assessment; 2) focusing on strengths; 3) organizing for the learning tasks, and 4) modeling how to teach concepts and strategies for learning in the content areas.

#### Step one: Needs Assessment

The prior knowledge, needs, and experiences brought to the situation by each participant determine in large measure what will be learned from the course experiences. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a needs assessment during the initial session to determine entry level needs and understandings. Each participant is given a 3 X 5 card to provide 1) the present teaching responsibility; 2) purpose for course enrollment; 3) prior experiences and training in reading,

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and 4) expected outcomes. Once the needs assessment has been completed and the information analyzed, the course plan is modified to meet participant needs and focus on strengths. During the fourth session a second 3 X 5 card is given to the participants. They are requested to identify any areas of need which are not being met at that time and are not included in the course outline.

#### Step two: Focusing On Strengths

It can generally be assumed that content teachers are proficient in the subject matter of their fields. They understand the special vocabulary, student knowledge, and concepts needed to make learning meaningful to students. An extensive body of research supports focusing on the strengths of learners and building new competencies on prior knowledge (Pearson and Johnson, 1978). Time is spent prior to each class activity taking up concepts and vocabulary, and relating them to the content fields of the participants. These introductory activities are critical since they establish connections between the known and the unknown as well as the purpose for the class activities.

#### Step three: Organizing for the Learning Tasks

The classroom organization for learning focuses on active participation of the students in the learning process. Several instructional strategies are modeled by the instructor with emphasis on decreasing classroom management problems and increasing the probability of student learning. Lectures are presented on topics focusing on strategies for helping students learn how to learn from text, effective instructional strategies and the instructional environment. Participants work in small groups to develop questions about the lectures or to determine topics for which they would like additional information. Strategy presentations by the instructor focus on understanding reading as an interactive process and effective ways to enhance comprehension skills. Each participant is required to research one instructional strategy meant to enhance comprehension of text materials for presentation to the class. Each small group is required to research one relevant topic and make a group presentation of the findings to the class. Forty-five minutes is provided during each class period for group work. In addition, a variety of current journals, films, and filmstrips are made available in the classroom by the instructor. These materials are available

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for in-class use only. A schedule is developed with the instructor for individual and group presentations to the class.

#### Step four: Modeling Strategies for Teaching and Learning

The instructor has the responsibility for creating the learning environment and facilitating instructional activities designed to teach students concepts and skills. Modeling the teaching of concepts and skills is an effective strategy for demonstrating how to provide definitions and examples of the use of concepts and skills being taught. Such a program can be enhanced by modeling effective strategies for teaching higher order thinking to aid students in effectively processing information.

One teaching strategy to help students understand text is modeled by the instructor during each class session (Appendix A). A point is made to emphasize that each strategy can be adapted for use in most content areas to improve the probability of student learning. A one page summary is provided each participant for each instructional strategy demonstrated throughout the course either by the instructor or the participants. Each summary includes:

1. Content or skill area
2. Objective(s) for the learners
3. Guiding principles
4. Procedures for instruction in sequentially numbered steps
5. Suggestions for variations (if any).

#### Conclusions

It is important that teachers learn how to learn and in the process learn to provide more effectively for meeting the needs of the students they teach. It is equally important that teachers and learners have available numerous strategies which can be selected for use as the situation demands (Moore, Readence, and Rickelman, 1982). The four guidelines discussed provide participants with an effective learning environment, teaching strategies for active learning, and opportunities to demonstrate skills learned. Utilized effectively, the probability of student learning will be increased through effective instruction.

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## APPENDIX A

### Sample Lesson Employing Direct Instruction

**Note:** In direct instruction the teacher shows, models, demonstrates, teaches the skill to be learned (Baumann, 1984). The teacher is the key person in the lesson and provides all of the information, examples, illustrations as opposed to having the learners actively involved in the learning process.

Anticipatory Set: Children learn to speak by first saying words, then phrases followed by sentences. In similar order, the reader must learn to detect the difference between questions which can be answered directly from text (text explicit) - information is found in the text; questions for which answers can be inferred from the text (text implicit) - information in the text can be used to draw an inference, and questions which must be answered from background knowledge (schema implicit). What we will learn to do today is to examine questions developed from a selection and determine which of the three types of information is required to answer the questions.

#### Direct Instruction:

Follow along with me and read the selection silently as I read it aloud. We will read the selection on the transparency then classify the questions that follow as text explicit, text implicit or schema implicit.

Example:

Testing can be carried out more quickly yet equally accurately if computers are used to present adaptive tests. In this adaptive feature, the response to one question--right or wrong--would determine the difficulty level of the next item presented. That is, the computer would present an easier item if the test taker had just erred, or give a more difficult one if the preceding answer had been correct (Journal of Reading, 29. 88).

What are adaptive tests?

What occurs if the test taker makes an error?

What feature has increased the accuracy of computerized tests?

Can the adaptive feature be used for tests in all subject areas?

Now read the first question and tell me if the answer is

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included in the text (text explicit); inferred from information in the text (text implicit), or derived from prior experiences or information (schema implicit). (Student response.) "The answer to this question is schema based. Prior knowledge about adaptive tests is necessary to answer the question." Very good. (Instructor writes schema based in parentheses at the end of the question.) Let's examine the second question to determine the type of information needed to answer it. (Student response.) "The next item presented by the computer is an easier one. The answer is found in the text and is, therefore, text explicit." (Instructor writes text explicit at the end of the question.) Who can help us with the type of information needed to answer the third question? (Student response.) "The answer is text implicit. It is not stated directly, but can be inferred from available information." Yest, that is correct. (Instructor writes text implicit at the end of the question.) Now let's look at the last question. Can the adaptive feature be used for tests in all subject areas? (Student response.) "The answer to this question is also text implicit. One can infer from the word tests in the text that the adaptive feature may be used for different types of tests." Very good. You have demonstrated that you understand the difference among text explicit, text implicit, and schema implicit information. (Instructor writes text implicit at the end of the last question.)

#### Teacher-Directed Guided Practice:

I have a selection which we will complete together. (Instructor distributes copies of the activity.) Read the directions silently as I read them aloud. Read the selection. Then read the questions which follow. At the end of each question write either text explicit, text implicit, or schema implicit to indicate the type of information needed to answer each question. (Students complete the exercise.) Who can tell us what type of question the first question is? (Student response.) "Schema implicit." Very good. Now, let's answer question two. (Student response.) "Text implicit." Yes, you understand how to determine the different types of questions. It is extremely important to develop more questions that are schema implicit and text implicit that the text implicit type. (Students and instructor proceed to complete the remaining questions.)

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### Independent Practice

The final activity for this lesson is the independent completion of a similar activity. (Instructor distributes copies of the activity.) It is necessary that students are able to function effectively with these skills before they can effectively read the lines, read between the lines, and read beyond the lines.

Note: Students receive an outline of the steps in the procedure and copies of the exercises used in the lesson.

## APPENDIX B - Strategy Outline

Title

I. Content/Skill Area

II. Objectives

A.

B.

III. Procedures for instruction

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

IV. Suggested Variations (if any)