

Title: “Becoming a Strategic Reader”

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Synopsis: (Authors’ Abstract) “An important aspect of learning to read is understanding how to use strategies to aid comprehension. Many actions such as skimming, using context to discern unfamiliar words, and taking notes to aid remembering can promote reading comprehension and learning. In this paper we examine aspects of knowledge and motivation that are critical to becoming a strategic reader. We emphasize that agents are strategic, not actions removed from contexts, and that self-guided learning depends on the intentions, perceptions, and attributions of learners. Learning to read strategically is related to children’s cognitive development as well as to the social contexts of instruction. Some suggestions are offered for classroom instruction that can promote children’s awareness and use of strategic reading.” (p. 293)

(Further Detail) When children are first learning to read, they are quite naive about what the task requires. Young children may not understand that they should read the print, not the pictures, or that they should read from left to right. Once they figure out the basics, however, children are still very poor at attending to the meaning of what they read. They often fail to self-correct for sense or notice when the text is illogical. They generally do not adjust their reading rate, look back, reread, take notes, or make any special plans to learn material they’ve been told to study. They don’t understand their cognitive goals, and they fail to make plans to reach those goals.

The authors’ research suggests that it isn’t enough for students to simply understand a given strategy. They must know how, when, and why to use it: *how* do I skim something, *when* should I skim and when should I read carefully, *why* is it useful to skim? Further, they must be *motivated* to use the strategy: “It seems to us that strategies combine components of both skill and will.” (p. 304) Goals for reading should have personal significance for children. Strategies must be seen as personally meaningful and useful. Studies show that children who are directly told that a strategy is useful for learning the material are more likely to practice it. Strategies should also be seen as efficient: children will not continue to use a strategy that they think takes too much time and effort.

The authors argue that teachers should teach reading strategies directly, but they should also persuade students of the utility of these strategies. They are implementing these ideas in a longitudinal, experimental study involving third and fifth grade classes. After 4 months of instruction in reading strategies, emphasizing the significance and utility of the strategies, the students in the experimental classes scored significantly higher than students in the control classes in metacognitive skills, error detection, strategy ratings, cloze tasks, and reading comprehension. (p. 312)

Quote(s): “Strategies are deliberate actions and therefore are available for introspection or conscious report. . . . [T]hinking about one’s thinking is at the core of strategic behavior.” (p. 295)

“What is the value of reading strategically? A major benefit is that reading becomes public. Students can analyze and talk about their own behavior. Teachers can isolate component actions to model and evaluate. Sharing

knowledge during instruction helps students to understand how and why they should use particular tactics.” (p. 296)

“Discussing, understanding, and applying strategic actions are especially important in three reading situations; during initial learning, for troubleshooting, and when processing capacity is exceeded (e.g., the task is too difficult or the subject is fatigued or stressed).” (p. 297)

“A key to reading proficiency, though, is the ability to detect and repair one’s own comprehension difficulties. Unfortunately, these actions are not available to many beginning or poor readers as either routine skills or fallback strategies for self-correction.” (p. 300)

“A large body of evidence reveals that poor readers do not skim, scan, reread, integrate information, plan ahead, take notes, make inferences, and so forth as often as more skilled readers (Anderson & Armbruster, 1982); Golinkoff, 1976; Ryan, 1981; Sullivan, 1978).” (p. 300)

“The awareness of the need to monitor one’s own comprehension during reading, a kind of mental pulse taking, is important for strategic reading. It illustrates the need for specific repair actions and thus provides a rationale for using fix-up strategies.” (p. 301)

“Owings, Peterson, Bransford, Morris, and Stein (1980) presented successful and less successful fifth graders with two kinds of passages, arbitrary and logically structured. Only the more successful students adjusted their reading and studying strategies according to the text features.” (p. 302)

“When fourth graders were provided with student aids and instructed to read a passage for a later test, good readers asked more questions, took notes more often, and used a dictionary more frequently than poor readers (Paris & Myers, 1981).” (p. 302)

“Beginning readers need to be persuaded that the instructed techniques are useful and necessary. Children need to learn the conditions under which strategies are applied and not applied. Then they will know when and why to use them.” (p. 312)

“At this point we are encouraged that reading strategies can be taught directly.” (p. 312)