



# Introduction

## Outcomes of this book

- Reflect on your development and learning as a reader
- Develop an increased knowledge base about literacy instruction in all content areas
- Describe the three interactive reading ingredients: Reader, Context and Text
- Identify and incorporate the traits and attributes of a strategic reader
- Examine information and practise strategies for teaching reading in your content area
- Engage in reflective practice and analyse the potential impact of strategic reading on student learning
- Participate as a member of a learning team

# Chapter 1

## Strategic Reading in the Content Areas: Practical Applications for Creating a Thinking Environment

*“Intelligence is when you know your strengths and you utilize them, and you know your weaknesses and you compensate for them.”*

– Robert Sternberg

### Introduction

Children must be lured into the wonderful world of books. “Few children learn to love reading on their own,” says noted book reviewer, Orville Prescott. Reading shapes our lives – either positively or negatively. Think of turning points in your path to becoming a reader. What lured you into books? Who influenced you as a reader? You may be surprised to know that reading was a struggle during my formal learning years. The first positive memory I recall occurred during my first year of teaching when a veteran teacher introduced me to a vast array of read-aloud books. Reading aloud not only helped me manage a class of ornery boys but lured me into the exciting world of print. Some thirty years later, I am not only thankful for the guidance of that caring teacher, but I also have had numerous conversations with adults and students about their turning points in becoming a reader.

I am finding that readers are born every day, often as the result of one caring individual. What I am also noticing is that student responses differ from adult reflections. Adults tend to view reading as a meaningful way to interact with other adults. They value the opportunity to read and share thoughts with friends. Personal selection of materials based on where they are in their lives is important to them. For example, new mothers may read and converse about having babies, whereas adults in their fifties may read and reflect on retirement.

In interviews some students reported that turning points occurred as a result of teachers reading aloud favourite books, getting to select books of interest, reading and sharing with a friend, or free reading time. Unfortunately, too many students responded with “I read to get the assignment done,” or “I read to please the teacher.” Sometimes daringly honest students revealed that they did not bother to read the assignment because the following day the teacher would tell them what they needed to know.

## Rationale

*“Ultimately, we want teachers in all content areas to understand that teaching reading in their discipline is teaching the content, that the texts and ways of talking about and interpreting those texts are at the heart of their discipline.”*

— Cynthia Greenleaf

Because it is important for students to be life-long readers, they must be given chances to reflect on themselves as readers and to view reading as a meaningful, worthwhile process. When reading is connected to students’ lives, they enjoy the experience and are motivated to read. Turning points occur as memorable moments, created when the reader connects and interacts with the printed word. These experiences activate the reader, uncovering insights about themselves and the world, and often turn fledgling readers into life-long readers.

Since the first publication of *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas: If Not Me Then Who?* (1996) greater emphasis has been placed on reading processes in years P–12. Societal and economic changes, as well as disheartening reading scores on tests, have caused school systems to emphasise literacy efforts. Employability rests on the ability to read. For example, in 1974 auto technicians were responsible for 5000 pages of print, in 1994 it increased to 500,000 pages, and by 2000 car mechanics needed to understand 1,000,000 pages of service manuals to fix an automobile. Students must be equipped with strategic reading competencies to navigate in this information age.

Schools have responded to these demands in various ways. Today more than ever there is greater emphasis on reading processes and strategy instruction. Yet questions still surface.

- When does the journey to become a strategic reader begin and how early should teachers focus on strategic reading in the content areas?
- What is the role of informative text in the primary year levels?
- Who is responsible for teaching reading in the content areas?
- Are all teachers adequately equipped to address classroom reading demands?

The purpose of *Strategic Reading in the Content Areas* is to address these questions and to outline how all classroom teachers can support students in becoming strategic readers.

Advancement in reading abilities will not come about through continued emphasis on reading instruction in isolation from the other work students do at school. Sending students to the “reading room” seldom addresses their inadequacies in reading a maths word problem or understanding how to read difficult science concepts. Teachers are discovering that teaching reading in their content areas not only increases student performance, but it is essential to be successful in the world in which we live. Maths author Tonda Dunbar suggests, “Maths students must be able to read and interpret various types of maths problems, to analyse and apply appropriate strategies, and then perform the maths necessary to solve the problem.” Primary teacher, Molly House, states, “When primary teachers make sure that informative text is accessible to their students and model how to use strategies to make meaning from

text, students become strategic readers.” Kevin Gerrity believes, “The integration of reading and music will augment the learning process and do much to produce musicians who have a greater appreciation and understanding of their work.” (See Chapters 6 and 7)

## Creating Communities of Learners

Creating this shift is not easy for the educator or the learner. It is important that learners understand the need for developing literacy skills across all content areas and throughout a lifetime. In order for this to occur, reading must become a vital instructional practice in all content areas. Learners have to become adept at assessing themselves as readers; they must develop and apply a vast toolkit of fix-it strategies and know how to monitor their own understanding of text. Self-assessment is the key to developing strategic readers.

*“In the last 10 years there’s been a lot of research done about what makes*

*a difference for student achievement, and it’s now clear that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. Teacher qualifications, teacher’s knowledge and skills, make more of a difference for student learning than any other single factor.”*

— Linda Darling-Hammond, Professor at Stanford University

If we want to create a literate environment in which all teachers feel competent addressing reading problems and planning instruction to foster reading development, schools must invest in quality professional development. As I work with teachers and principals, I am witnessing professional development efforts that are making a difference. One educational agency invested in a three year program to train teachers and principals. Teachers and principals participated in large group training sessions, small group networking sessions, and classroom observation and coaching opportunities. Student performance not only increased on the state assessment but students were also reading more and enjoying it. Vocabulary skills improved, and all students participated in class discussions about their readings.

In some areas teachers and administrators have created learning teams to read, study and implement ideas for developing strategic readers. Research indicates that when adults model the importance of reading, student reading increases. This book, *Strategic Reading in the Content Areas: Practical Applications for Creating a Thinking Environment*, incorporates a learning team format. It is my hope that teachers and principals will read and discuss the process activities, and ultimately will use new ideas with students. The goal is to develop a community of readers modelling the process for students. Effective professional development demands ongoing, long-term investments of time, energy and effort from all staff members participating at all year levels and across all content areas. Only then will students have the chance to excel as readers in all content areas.

## Structure of the Book

So what will you find in this book? Chapter 1 provides you with the rationale for taking the time and energy to focus on developing strategic readers, as well as examples of staff development plans. Chapter 2 reviews the research supporting professional development for reading in the content areas. The research is organised into eight principles of learning and explains the connection between being a strategic learner and making the connection to reading.

Chapter 3 delves into the title of the book *Strategic Reading in the Content Areas*. This chapter explains what strategic reading involves and how to develop strategic readers, and also provides a framework for strategic reading in all content areas. Chapter 4 revisits the importance of metacognition – “Thinking about your thinking” during reading. Three metacognitive tools – questioning, talking and writing – are described. If you want to update yourself on the three interactive reading elements outlined in *Teaching Reading in the Content Areas: If Not Me Then Who?* proceed to Chapter 5. You will find current research relating to the reading ingredients: reader; context; and text; as well as a multitude of examples obtained from teachers with whom I have worked.

Chapters 6 and 7 are written by classroom teachers who explain what it means to teach reading in specific content areas. Voices from the classroom include teachers who emphasise strategic reading through informative text with primary age children, teachers who focus on the needs of the English Language Learners/ESL students, as well as teachers of content areas like science and social studies. They state why it is important that content teachers take responsibility for reading and provide numerous examples for developing strategic readers.

Three reading staples – read-aloud, sustained silent reading (SSR), and parent or guardian involvement in creating readers – are explained in Chapter 8. Perhaps you are already a believer of strategic reading in the content areas and have been exploring the use of children’s literature to motivate students to read. Your search for exciting literature selections has been made easier with Chapter 9, an annotated bibliography of more than 200 selections representing all content areas. Some selections cited in the bibliography are incorporated in the text as instructional examples. The Appendix includes information on learning teams and strategy pages to be used by learning team members. Questions for textbook adoption complete this section.

“As we read text in our own language, the text itself becomes a barrier. We can go into it as far as its words allow, embracing all their possible definitions; we can bring other texts to bear upon it and to reflect it, as in a hall of mirrors; we can construct another, critical text that will extend and illuminate the one we are reading; but we cannot escape the fact that its language is the limit of the universe.”

— Alberto Manguel