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Capturing ALL of the Reader Through the Reading Assessment System

Outcomes of this book

- To examine effective reading assessment practices
- To understand the characteristics of a strategic reader
- To analyse the principles of learning and their effects on the reading process
- To understand the assumptions of quality assessment and the components of the reading assessment system
- To analyse the effects of using reading assessment tasks with students
- To reflect on learning and application when incorporating instructional reading strategies in all content areas
- To develop reading assessment tasks

Chapter 2 Focus

Developing Strategic Readers

“Learning Teams”

In the process of working through this chapter, you will—

- examine the three interactive ingredients of the reading process;
- understand the characteristics of a strategic reader;
- compare the concept of “learning to read” with “reading to learn”;
- analyse the teacher’s role in developing strategic readers in all content areas.

Questions to ponder as you read—

- 1) How do you describe a strategic reader in your content area?
- 2) What challenges do students face as they read to learn your content?
- 3) In what ways do you intentionally work to develop strategic readers?
- 4) What strategies might students say they use to assist comprehension before, during and after reading?

Preparing to read this chapter—

In this chapter we will explore the issues to consider when teaching reading in all content areas. The chapter begins by defining the reading process and explaining three interactive reading ingredients. Characteristics of a strategic reader are outlined, and the teacher’s role in developing strategic readers is defined. The process activity, Team Interview (Billmeyer, 2010), provides an opportunity to think about yourself as a strategic reader.

Process Activity

To prepare your mind for reading about developing strategic readers, complete this Team Interview.

- 1) Write your response to each question. Have a colleague or team member complete the same questions.
 - What is one word or phrase that describes you as a reader?
 - What is a fix-it strategy you use to assist comprehension?
 - What motivates you to read?
 - How would you describe a successful reader? What do they do?
- 2) Dialogue with a team member to compare thoughts.
- 3) Discuss process questions with a team member.
 - What learning are you taking away from the Team Interview activity?
 - What did you learn about yourself as a reader? How are you similar to your team member? How are you different?
 - How might students be similar/different?

Reflect on your responses to the four questions as you read the chapter.

Principles of Learning

*Learning is not developed from the outside-in,
but from the INSIDE-OUT.*

—Langer, Purcell-Gates, 1985

Knowing how students learn is the basis for effective decision making in the classroom. A major goal of education is to create life-long learners who set learning goals, choose effective learning strategies and assess their own progress. In order to develop effective teaching methods which promote independent learning, teachers need to understand learning processes.

Each learner and each learning experience is unique; yet research identifies specific patterns and generalisations about learning processes. Creating productive learning environments requires an understanding of the commonalities and differences found within and among learners.

For years researchers have studied how we learn. Studies in effective instruction, cognitive psychology and teaching for transfer suggest a new definition of learning. In the past the focus was on the teacher and teaching processes; a new definition recommends a shift of focus to the learner and learning processes. Shifting from a teaching-centred to a more learning-focused environment has great implications for classroom practice.

Instead of simply “covering the material” or presenting content to learners, it is critical for teachers to identify the ways learners can embrace content being taught. Instead of focusing on what the teacher is doing, it is first necessary to examine learning processes. Research suggests that a learning-focused classroom embraces eight principles. These principles provide a framework that is important for organising productive learning environments.

A Strategic Learner relies on cognitive and metacognitive abilities.

Metacognition, often defined as “thinking about one’s thinking”, is to be aware of and to have control over cognitive abilities. Productive thinking and learning require goal setting; frequent monitoring before, during and after learning; assessing and reassessing. Strategic learners tend to incorporate these behaviours into their learning process automatically. While it might appear that the students who demonstrate these behaviours are on automatic pilot, what makes them strategic learners is the ability to recognise when there is a problem with the learning and to use strategies to solve the problem. Problems might include inconsistencies in thinking, comprehension failure or difficulty with understanding the meaning of vocabulary specifically related to a concept. Students who can use a repertoire of learning strategies to solve problems are capable, independent learners.

Strategies are different from skills. Predicting, paraphrasing and considering opposing points of view before making a final decision are a few examples of metacognitive skills. Skills are mental activities or behaviours that can be applied to specific learning situations. Strategies, often called fix-it strategies, are specific ways of executing a given skill, or