



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## BREATHING AND READING

What does the future hold for books and reading? What impact will emerging technologies have on the printed word and how students process information? With open admissions policies, the question is not how to select successful students, but how to develop success in those students who enroll.

Reading provides a foundation for learning. Readers and writers co-produce images and ideas through the reading process. Reading for understanding is influenced by teacher and student behaviors. Developmental students are frequently taught more steps, more repetition, and fewer problem-solving tasks. Although informed instruction often results in some short-term student achievement, there is frequently little gain in advanced skills. Students at any level can improve their basic skills and develop higher cognitive thinking skills, too.

Teaching beyond the basics encourages reading for meaning. Active, self-directed learning develops through collaborative and meaningful learning experiences which engage learners in exploration and application of knowledge. Basic reading skills can be embedded in more global tasks. Consider these strategies that encourage reading development.

### Reading Scaffolding

Prior knowledge helps learners connect with and internalize new ideas. How can reading skills be improved without first understanding the process of reading? Early on, I try to provide clear, organized lessons on the process of reading in order to build understanding of basic reading concepts. I talk with students about reading, and examine the process of reading, the key elements readers need, strategies that confirm comprehension, the value of prior knowledge, and assessment of reading habits. As the semester develops, I encourage class discussion. Students think about, write, and discuss what they already know about a specific writer/book/topic, then formulate specific questions about what they want to know; following the

assigned readings, they discuss what they have learned from reading. This strategy serves as scaffolding for learning; activating prior knowledge helps learners connect old to new information, resulting in improved learning.

### Reading Journals

Thinking and writing about reading will help learners internalize meaning. Making meaning is the most important aspect of reading. Required texts are essential; they provide valuable information and basic reading concepts, but there is much more to improved college reading than completing required texts.

I want students to enjoy reading. I immerse the class in books. I fill class shelves with books from my personal library, as well as from departmental collections. I incorporate reading journals to encourage class discussions, collaborative activities, and positive reading experiences. Students self-select books and introduce new writers to one another through written and oral retells. Student ownership and motivation are improved by this process.

I have found that students learn from one another; group discussions and dialogue encourage ideas and understandings and students enjoy the informal discussions. Dialogue ranges from history discussions such as the German occupation of Denmark in *Number the Stars* or World War II issues from *Saving Private Ryan*, to social issues and family disruption in *Stepmom* to how it feels to be different in *Jack*. Both cognitive and affective domains are developed, resulting in a holistic learning approach. Students become more self-directed with improved critical thinking skills.

Writing about what is read provides valuable assessment—for students and teachers. Each student completes a portfolio of written responses to the readings. These portfolios include written retells of character development and plot summary, personal connections from life experiences, as well as personal reflections. Student portfolios provide for the assessment of readers' levels of comprehension, as well as applications of knowledge.



## Reading Aloud

Graphophonics make up only part of the reading process, but it is important for learners to hear the written word. Initially, I was hesitant to read aloud to my students, but I soon discovered the value of providing positive reading experiences. I select a variety of writers/topics based on the individual class personalities and diversities. Students have an opportunity to relax, listen, and appreciate reading at different levels—to hear the written word articulated by a voice other than the one we provide ourselves as silent readers.

## Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary strategies are developed through mini-lessons, class discussions, and application of strategies through collaborative learning. Students self-monitor their understanding of new and confusing words through the process of miscue analysis. While reading, students select words that are unfamiliar or not clearly understood. Collectively, my reading classes develop journals of words from their own texts and readings. We discuss new words in context, applying vocabulary strategies with in-class activities to discern word meanings.

## Literature Study

The class reads, writes, and discusses a novel. The process of literature study encourages class discussion, character analysis, prediction, summary of events, and going beyond the facts by making personal connections to what is being read. Class- and teacher-generated questions serve as points for discussion. Students are engaged in application of reading skills through the selection of main ideas, supporting details, inferences, and writer's purpose and tone. Reading and writing develop through practice. Thinking, writing, and talking about reading develop improved comprehension.

## Library Orientation/N.C.Live/Internet Searches

Finding appropriate books, references, and available resources is important to student success. In cooperation with the LRC staff, students in the reading class receive an in-depth orientation to library services. Students are given hands-on learning through class exercises. It is helpful to know how and where to find good books.

Last fall, I integrated a North Carolina writers component into the reading program. Cooperative efforts with our college LRC staff resulted in more books and a reserve section for North Carolina writers. During class, I read aloud and introduced several N.C. writers and books to my students. I asked them to self-select, read, and keep reading journals on N.C. writers. Written

and oral retells give students an opportunity to learn about new writers and facts. Of equal importance, students also learn truths about human nature and increase understanding of themselves and others. Conversation improves comprehension as students listen and learn from one another. Selecting regional writers initially helps gain student interest in reading through personal connections to places and ideas known to them; connecting old to new improves learning.

Blending direct instruction with these cognitive approaches has been successful. Entry-/exit-level reading scores reflect student achievement. Approximately 82% of my students show improvement. A major component of effective reading instruction is teaching basic reading skills; incorporating meaningful contexts for reading, collaborative activities, and dialogue motivates and encourages self-directed lifelong readers. Reading and writing about what has been read encourages self-exploration and learning. Books are, in the words of Ernest Hemingway, moveable feasts—opening up subjective space for invisible musings and understandings. Just as thinking about and exercising something as unconscious as breathing can help us breathe more deeply, thinking about and exercising something as unconscious and basic as reading can help us read more deeply.

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