

Reading in Every Classroom, Every Day

*Reading and thinking
go hand in hand, and
students should do
both regularly in
all classes.*

By Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher

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Watch the Video!

Watch a teacher engage students in a close reading of a complex text.

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Effective schools have focus, and often their focus involves students exercising their literacy skills in every classroom. In less effective schools, students are not required to engage in the expressive literacy skills of reading, writing, and speaking throughout the school day. Instead, they engage in receptive literacies, primarily listening and speaking. For at least the past 50 years, there have been advocates for content-area reading and reading instruction across the curriculum.

To a large extent, those efforts have been unsuccessful and students are not always required to read every day in every class. In part, that is because secondary school teachers have a lot of content to cover. Some teachers feel that reading should be done outside of class. Others think that reading and reading instruction are the responsibilities of the English department. And still others think that their content areas have nothing to read. It is also not uncommon for teachers to assume the responsibility of reading for their students, especially when a majority of the students in a classroom read well below grade level. Such misguided practices do little to advance students' literacy skills, however, and instead perpetuate a system of low expectations among secondary learners.

As an instructional leader, part of your responsibility is to ensure that students develop literacy in each content area. For students to do so, they must actually read in class. We recommend that schools set goals that every student reads, every day, in every class. We said *goal*, rather than *rule*, because there is probably a day here or there when reading just can't happen. We also believe that setting a goal helps in

the lesson-planning process as teachers think about what students in their classes should read and when they should read it. Following are a few ways to facilitate students' reading in class.

Independent Reading

One way to ensure that students read in class is to give them time to read. Unlike sustained silent reading, in which students read texts of their own choosing, independent reading is an activity in which their choices are constrained. For example, in his Earth Science class, teacher Adam Renick gives his students 10 minutes each day to read about the content they are studying. Renick noted that "scientists read every day as part of their jobs, and I want my students to have that same experience." Reading widely builds students' background knowledge and vocabulary, which is really important in content areas for which students have limited experience. There is evidence that when students are given time for independent reading of content-area-aligned texts, their performance improves (Fisher, Ross, & Grant, 2010).

For most teachers, the difficulty with providing independent reading lies in locating and storing appropriate texts. Renick has storage boxes labeled for each of the Earth Science standards and keeps readings appropriate for the standard in each box. As the class begins its investigation of each aspect of earth science, he changes the selection so that students always have appropriate reading materials. In addition, Renick subscribes to several magazines that are appropriate for his content area and encourages students to read articles from them. In the video that accompanies this column,

you'll see Renick read to his students, modeling his reading process, and then you'll see his students read widely within the discipline.

Reciprocal Teaching

As groups of students read and talk about what they read, they learn more. One structure for facilitating student reading and discussion is reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). During reciprocal teaching conversations, students assume one of four roles and the group practices a specific comprehension strategy: predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying. As they read, they pause periodically to talk about what they are reading. In some cases, they change roles each time they talk. In other cases, they practice the same role throughout the reading. It's important to note that reciprocal teaching groups do not have to consist of four students; students can share a role or a student can have more than one role.

The point of reciprocal teaching is to encourage reading and deep understanding of a text. For example, during their discussion of immigration as part of a unit on industrialization in the United States, students in Javier Vaca's US History class engaged in reciprocal teaching. Part of the conversation of one group highlights the learning that occurred:

Marco: So, I have a question. What does it mean by "push and pull"? What does that have to do with immigration?

Daisy: I think that they're saying that there were things that pushed the immigrants out of their home countries. Like, for example, some people weren't respected because of their religion.

Alexis: Yeah, and then some people were pushed out because they didn't have enough money. That was gonna be part of my summary, because they're saying that when people can't afford to live in a place, they want to look for a new opportunity.

Uriel: That's the pull, right? Because the US was a place where people could go to get a better life and make enough money to take care of their families. So, I'll make a prediction. I predict that the next section will tell why that didn't work, because we still have a lot of poverty here, so it couldn't have all worked.

Vanessa: I remember that part where it said that the immigrants thought that "the streets were paved with gold." See, right here [pointing to a place in the text], but they weren't. They were just normal streets, but that was a pull, to think that the US had so much money that they put gold on the street.

SQ3R

Study skills are an important part of the secondary school curriculum. One of the ways that we can help students learn to study while reading is through the SQ3R process (Robinson, 1946):

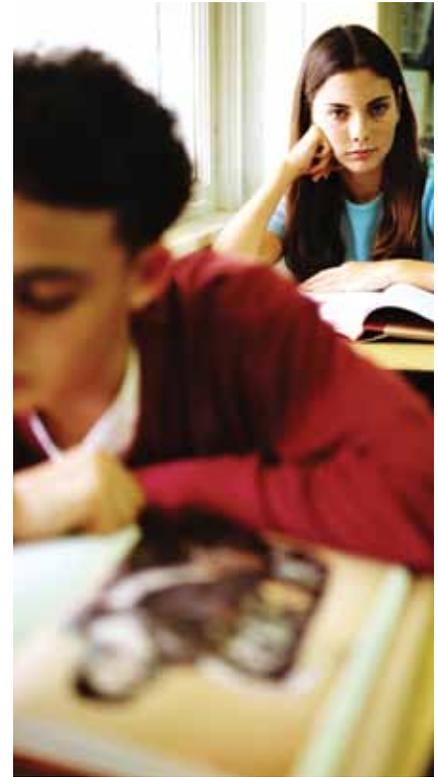
Survey: skim text for headings and charts

Question: turn headings into questions

Read: read to answer questions

Recite: answer questions and make notes

Review: reread for details and unanswered questions.



This process can be easily integrated into most subject-area classrooms. For example, while reading artist biographies in their integrated arts class, the students in Don Winter's class used the procedure to focus on content information. Working in pairs, students read their assigned biography and then engaged in SQ3R.

One of the groups was learning about Frida Kahlo and had taken notes about her early life growing up with polio and the bus accident that nearly killed her but spurred her career as an artist. They examined her relationship with Diego Rivera; her painting style; and her major works, including *The Two Fridas*. Using a PBS website of the painting (www.pbs.org/weta/fridakahlo/worksofart/index.html), the students rolled the cursor over different elements of the painting to activate pop-up texts explaining those elements.

This process has also been adapted for use in mathematics classrooms.

Helping teachers identify ways to integrate reading opportunities into the classroom is an important role of the instructional leader and will result in higher quality instruction.

For students to learn to read math problems, Fay (1965) advocated for SQRQCQ, which focused on:

- Survey: skim the text to get the main idea of the problem
- Question: ask the question that is stated in the problem
- Reread: identify the information and details provided
- Question: ask what operation must be performed
- Compute: solve the problem
- Question: ask whether the answer makes sense.

Although this may not be typical reading, it does teach students how to read and think about the problems that they are required to solve. That's not to say that math teachers can't also provide independent reading or reciprocal teaching opportunities in their classrooms. Dina Burow, an Algebra II teacher, has her students read short pieces of text in which there are embedded problems. Along the way, they learn something about math use in the world outside of school, practice their reading skills, and complete

problems.

Burow designed a word problem about the probability of various classroom teachers winning a competitive fundraising contest at the school. "Now, remember to use SQRQCQ to solve this together," she reminded her students. After skimming the problem, Mykia told her group, "OK, the problem is asking us to set up a probability table for each of the classes," she said. "Right," offered Ming. "The details say that Chen has a one in sixteen chance of winning, and so does Johnson. Teichman, Anderson, and Wilson all have the same probability of winning." "That's right, but we don't know what that probability is," said Ron, adding, "We have to make that $3p$," and writing it down on the group's whiteboard.

Over the next few minutes, the group figured out that because it was a contest, someone had to win, and represented that as a value of 1. As they worked through the information in the word problem, they constructed a table that included each teacher's information, then solved for the probability of each. By slowing down their

reading process to closely analyze the details while thinking through the logic of the problem, the students were able to successfully determine the probability of each teacher being the one to raise the most money for the school's activity fund.

Conclusion

Reading requires thinking, and thinking is what teachers are looking for in secondary school classrooms. Unfortunately, there is evidence that students are reading less than ever before (Fisher, 2009). But teachers can change that by building reading into every classroom so that reading becomes a habit and students learn to read their content-area texts. Helping teachers identify ways to integrate reading opportunities into the classroom is an important role of the instructional leader and will result in higher quality instruction. **PL**

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