

knowledge of the topic come into play. Questions also may arise based upon the information encountered as the reader continues. Thus the path of the reader within the text may make the original purpose incomplete or irrelevant. (p. #26, #27)

When the purpose for reading is external such as an assignment imposed by a teacher, the student might accept that assignment and take steps to complete it. If there is some conflict internally, this conflict may lead to incomplete comprehension. This is especially true if the student fails to find relevance in the assignment given. If instruction is to be successful, the design of instruction must lead to student knowledge of learning how to comprehend through reading across a wide variety of texts, situations and contexts. (p. #27, #28) (Paraphrased.)

Given the complexity of comprehension, what kind of specific steps will lead to independence? Just how can we build and then remove a scaffold to create independent, thoughtful readers? Next, we will examine these steps. They are steps to be used in any content area and grade level. Teacher and student together will best negotiate the time frame of each step.

How to Facilitate Student Research

Steps in Helping Students Learn About Their Own Comprehension

1. Establish a specific goal with timelines.

Example: By Christmas break, I want my students to be able to use three strategies on their own to make meaning from text. I like to teach students more strategies than the number in my goal, so they will have a choice about which strategies to use with a given text or task—thus teaching metacognition along the way.

2. Choose the specific strategies you will teach students.

Teachers have the most success when they use strategies that meet a variety of learning purposes. Some examples:

- Concept Mapping and Two-Column Notes are strategies that deal with organization of text.
- Concept of Definition Map and Frayer Model are advanced vocabulary teaching tools.
- Conclusion-Support and Power Writing are excellent tools for dealing with complex texts or as pre-writing or pre-summary tools.
- The QAR strategy has been shown to help students' comprehension scores.

3. Plan each phase of your strategy instruction in detail.

Some teachers like to think in terms of “before,” “during,” and “after” learning.” Actually, think about the text you will use and how the strategy is a “fit” with the content of the text. Is the text considerate? What accommodations must be made for your students? It is most important to model repeatedly the strategy of choice. In order for students to utilize a strategy independently, they must “over-learn” that strategy and use it in a *variety* of learning tasks.

4. Prepare a log or journal.

Your students can use it to keep track of their grades and strategy use. In addition to test scores, prepare a series of questions or sentence completions for their journal entries (see #5). Model for students the types of entries you want for the questions and sentence completions. Once students become comfortable with these entries, have them share their comments with the whole class. Students are more engaged if they attach timelines to their goals for learning, so encourage them to include specific dates in their journal entries. To assess these log entries, collaborate with students to create a guide or rubric. (Note: One way to keep the energy flowing for progress up the students' learning curves is to use stickers, smiley faces, or “bling-bling” of some kind to attach to their logs. Some students enjoy creating analogies, e.g., the first test score is like a Ford Escort, next is a Toyota Corolla, and of course they are all working for the Lamborghini!) Both content learning and learning about their own learning will be aided by these journal entries. This depth of learning is often absent in schools today.

5. Develop guiding questions.

Here are some ideas you may want to include in the logs.

- Explain the difference between your last two scores. Include details related to which strategy you used for study and how you used it.
- How did the strategy you used help you learn the content? List at least three ways.
- If you remembered less, think about and write down what was missing for you in this strategy. How can you

fix this for the next time you study?

- Are you making progress with each strategy? Explain with at least three specifics why or why not.
- Which strategy is your preferred learning tool with the kinds of text we are currently studying? Why? (Give three reasons.)

6. **Begin the research.**

At a point when students are comfortable using several of the strategies, turn them loose. Teach and practice the signal you will use when students have a choice of strategies. In the beginning, I listed three strategies on the board and told students they could choose the one they wanted to use. Later, I used the phrase “make it your own” and students knew they could use any of the five strategies we had utilized over several weeks. “Here is the assigned text. Read and make it your own.” (Note: Research shows that the most successful students use multiple strategies to study and learn content. NRP, 2000)

7. **Teach students to learn from their mistakes.**

When Einstein was asked how do you learn, he replied, “I grope.” Since we know that each of us processes information uniquely, we realize that each time we approach a text to comprehend content, we may not make correct choices. We may misunderstand the main idea or follow what we assume to be logical and find we are on a “rabbit trail.” Indeed, Pressley (2002) suggests that the comprehension of text read the second time is not the same as the first reading. I know I have experienced that. The task is not about succeeding or failing. The task is about learning how I learn best and knowing what works for me. Keeping records and reflections and learning from them is one superhighway to independence in learning.

8. **Reflect on outcomes.**

Deeper learning occurs in a classroom where reflection is cultivated as part of the normal procedure related to study outcomes. Students observe more in their reading, have answers that represent more depth, and often express more divergent thinking and writing. In the rush of life today, just stopping to ponder various possibilities can extend precious processing time for minds requiring just that.

9. **Bump Up a Level.**

When you want to move up the learning curve for your students, require a synthesis of more than one source or text. Students will find using strategies an effective way to process and draw conclusions from multiple sources of content information. Here is an example in CRISS Strategic Learning Plan format.

Purpose

What factors influence the creation of lightning and how does lightning impact people in the United States?

Assessment

A written response to the purpose setting question. Based on how lightning is created, students need to include why some areas of the U.S. are impacted more than others. The impact discussed needs to include health issues, destruction of property, and the economy of various states.

Sources of Information

Two articles on lightning and a frequency chart showing dates, locations, and severity ratings.

Preparing for Understanding

Students do the K and W of K-W-L, focusing on the origin of lightning and its impact on people in the U.S.

Engaging Students with Content and Transforming Information

Students record the “L” information from the articles in Two-Column Main Idea—Detail Notes. If possible they add their “W” questions and the appropriate information. Students pull the information together from both articles in one Power Map with “Lightning” as the Power 1 and “Formation” and “Impact” as the two Power 2s. Under the impact branch, students add information from the frequency chart. Students then write a summary based on the information in the Concept Map.

10. **Discuss and write.**

Remember, the goal is to lead students to independent use of the strategies as a personal learning tool. Discussion about how they are doing, both in conversation with you the teacher and with each other, becomes a non-negotiable in the process. Writing down their reflections is also of major benefit. And there should be another learning goal waiting to appear when the current goal is reached.

These are some concrete ways to take students along the road to independence in learning. Students researching their own learning is one practical way to teach strategies to the level of student-ownership. For review and additional background knowledge, re-read Chapters One and Eleven in the 3rd edition of the CRISS Manual.

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