Who takes developmental reading in college?

Each year, the number of students enrolling in developmental level courses in postsecondary education increases. In fact, almost 42 percent of all freshmen enrolled in public 2-year colleges were enrolled in at least one developmental course (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Developmental education refers to courses and programs that address the needs of underprepared students and nontraditional students who lack the reading, writing, or math skills necessary for college-level work (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). While developmental course work can be a great help to many first year students, research has shown that the number of developmental courses and the kinds of developmental courses that students take makes a difference. The success of underprepared readers in college “is directly and significantly related to taking and passing a reading skills course” (Cox, Friesner, & Khayum, 2003, p. 170) and "deficiencies in reading skills are indicators of comprehensive literacy problems and they significantly lower the odds of a student's completing any degree" (Adelman, 1996, p. 56).

Much research has been done on various strategies and techniques to help developmental readers achieve success in college-level work. Before these strategies are implemented, two things need to happen. First, students who take the college placement test and place into developmental reading classes need to take the recommended courses. Research shows that students who have the option to skip these courses and do have a lower persistence rate (Roueche & Roueche, 2000). Second, developmental reading teachers need to consider their attitudes toward developmental readers. "Teachers should always begin with the understanding that students who need remediation are not stupid and have an array of literacies to draw upon that can help them interrogate, interpret, and revise dominating discourses" (Weiner, 2002, p. 152). They need to let their students know that "they bring a wealth of experience and insight to their work and to their peers" (Maloney, 2003, p. 665). Once this respect has been established for the students, strategies can be taught more effectively to improve students' reading skills.

Research has found that underprepared students who take and pass a remedial reading skills course "experience significantly greater success in college over the long term compared to similarly underprepared students who either do not take, or do not pass, such a course" (Cox et al., 2003, p. 189). The research also shows that remedial students who "were explicitly taught strategic reading outperformed" remedial students who were not. In addition students were found to transfer these skills into more reading intensive courses (Caverly, Nicholson, & Radcliffe, 2004).
**Developmental or Remedial? What’s in a name?**

While the terms "developmental" and "remedial" are often used interchangeably to describe the courses taken by unprepared or underprepared students, there is a distinction. Remedial often refers to courses that address "deficiencies in prior learning." It addresses academic needs. Developmental education, however, refers to the integration of personal development into the academic coursework. Personal development may include study skills and self-confidence (see Boylan, 2001, p. 1).

**What does the research say about developmental reading classes?**

"Many [developmental] teachers seem to believe that their goal is to focus on basic skills" but often, these skills do not prepare students for college level work (Maxwell, 1997, p. 11). In a general sense, basic skills instruction can be defined as instruction that supports practice of and improvement in discrete reading skills (Stallworth-Clark, Scott, & Nist, 1996). Research has shown that remediation in reading needs to be more than "phonetic decoding, literal comprehension, and a generic engagement with language and written texts" (Weiner, 2002, p. 152). Assignments need to "activate and promote students' thoughtful interaction with textual material for various purposes, such as for story, procedural knowledge, or resource information" (Falk-Ross, 2002, p. 279). Research has also shown what is considered "basic skills" varies from institution to institution.

Who teaches developmental education in another factor. Developmental courses are often taught by adjunct faculty who do not have the time or the resources to further their professional education. They may "lack training or experience in working with adults, be uninformed about current theory, research, and practice in the college reading field," and they may not be aware of the reading demands of college level work (Maxwell, 1997, p. 9).

**What strategies produce strategic college readers?**

**Selecting the text.**

Developmental reading students need to be exposed to the types of texts that they will encounter in college-level courses. Their success in college depends on their "ability to engage in strategic reading of extensive academic or informational text" (Caverly et. al, 2004, p. 25). In order for the developmental reader to become literate in the "multiple discourses of the academy" students must be exposed to various types of readings and the "politics that inform them" (Weiner, 2002, p. 151). The text should be relevant to the students, for example an article with a topic the students are interested in or based on topics being covered in other areas of the curriculum (Fischer, 2003). The texts used in the developmental class should also "address issues and concepts relevant to the core curriculum" of the college (Maloney, 2003, p. 665).
Making connections.

Connecting to prior learning. It is important to tap into the student's past knowledge to build a framework for the text. "Make as many connections as you can between the knowledge the students possess and the subject of the text (Fischer, 2003). The texts "must also address topics from the core, serve as exemplars of various genres, and connect to the diversity of students' 'backgrounds' and 'life experiences'" (Maloney, 2003, p. 665). If possible, there needs to be "closer interaction between discipline-specific college faculty" and developmental reading instructors (Cox et. al, 2003, p. 191). One recommendation from this study is for these instructors and professors to offer students combined curriculum courses.

Connecting reading and writing. The developmental reading course itself is about "reading and writing about the texts" and that "students need to develop the habit of writing in a variety of controlled formats about what they read" (Maloney, 2003, p. 666). Instructors need to give students "complete, contextualized reading and writing experiences" (Lesley, 2001, p. 182). Students can keep a journal that consists of responses to class readings, discussions, and classmates' responses. Or, students can write down the answers to all of the questions the instructor asks them about the readings. This allows students to expand their skills because they have to "interpret the question' and then determine how to write a clear answer (Fischer, 2003). Instructors can engage their developmental reading students in an ongoing daily dialogue about the readings through double entry journal writing (Friedman, 1997). In this strategy, each student creates three columns on their piece of paper. In the first column (labeled Copy/Notes), the students write down interesting points about the reading. In the second column (labeled Response), students should record why they find these points interesting. The third column (labeled Feedback), is reserved for the instructor to make comments and offer feedback to the student. This method should help instructors and students understand the "deeper meaning" of the reading process and helping the students understand the process of critical reading.

Critical inquiry.

Another component of reading skills is this idea of "critical inquiry." Critical inquiry refers to not only the instructor asking questions of the students but also the students asking questions of the readings, other students, the instructor, and themselves. In one developmental class, students were asked two key questions to help sum up the day's class: "What did we do?" and "What did we learn?" (Lesley, 2001) Asking these questions helps instructors figure out how many of the students are "developing skills such as inference, empathy, and critical analysis" (2001, p. 185-186). As part of the critical inquiry process, students should be encouraged to read the piece multiple times, make notes in the margins, and ask questions about what they have read. The goal is to shift the emphasis on questioning from the instructor to the students. This will help them "to use questions as guidelines for thinking about the text" (Maloney, 2003, p. 671). Students should also be expected to conduct self-questioning of their own written work and assist the monitoring process of writing (El-Hindi, 1996).

Metacognition and self-regulation.

Metacognition can be defined as "the ability to reflect on one's own cognitive processes" (Baker & Brown, 1984, p. 353). What separates strong readers from those who are not is the
awareness of their reading process and problems. This is at the heart of learners who are actively engaged and in control of their own learning" (El-Hindi, 1996).

Various research studies have focused on metacognition to assess its effectiveness in helping students become strong readers. In one study, the connections between instruction in metacognitive development and increased awareness of metacognitive skills in order to enhance independent learning were examined. The researcher concluded that attention to metacognitive skill development would improve remedial reading programs (El-Hindi, 1996). In another metacognition research study, students were provided with a checklist of reading strategy statements that were effective and ineffective (Caverly et al., 2004). Students used the checklist in the pre- and post-assessment. Students checked "yes" if they used a particular strategy and "no" if they didn't. Caverly et al. found that "students' metacognitive awareness of effective strategic reading tactics improved after strategic reading instruction" (2004, p. 28).

Self-regulated learning, an aspect of metacognition, is another factor for creating independent and strong readers. Self-regulated learners understand their strengths and weaknesses, set reasonable goals, and create "strategies to realize goals by monitoring themselves rather than relying on the teacher" (Maitland, 2000, p. 26-27). Students with strong self-regulation skills have the ability to check the outcome of their problem solving, they plan their next steps, and monitor the "effectiveness" of their attempts. They also test, revise, and evaluate their learning strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984).

Conclusion
For more information on specific reading strategies, see our upcoming Research to Practice publication on Reading Strategies. You may also be interested in a very readable four part series on “Critical Thinking…and the Art of Close Reading” by Richard Paul and Linda Elder, published in the Journal of Developmental Education (2003-2004). The journal can be accessed online if you have a subscription or at your local community college. And, under More Resource, you will find Web sites that focus on this topic.

More Resources
Louisiana State University (LSU) Reading Strategies Course
This is an online PowerPoint presentation geared towards students and was developed by LSU's Learning Assistance Center. It helps students identify specific weakness in their reading strategies and comprehension. It offers examples for students to work through to help them get a better understanding of how the strategies work.
http://crse002.lsu.edu/lac/reading/ppframe.htm

Reading Quest/Strategies
This web site was put together by the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. It contains almost 30 reading comprehension strategies that come with activity suggestions and handouts.
http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat
Study Guides and Strategies
This Web site is not affiliated with any particular postsecondary or secondary institution but it contains an enormous amount of information for the transitioning student. The Reading Strategies section includes information on Reading Critically, Reading Difficult Texts, as well as Taking Notes from a Textbook. This site is updated frequently. http://www.studygs.net

References


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