

The Strategic Reader

A key tenet of being strategic stemmed from the work of developmental psychologists such as John Flavell (1977), who introduced the notion of meta memory—a precursor to metacognition that became synonymous with the ability to read strategically across a range of situations independently. In turn, the focus shifted to a learner’s self-awareness—the ability to judge and read a task or situation, to bring strategies to the task to address that task and its specific features, to adapt to circumstances, monitor and adjust progress, and consider a task’s relevance to one’s world. As the focus shifted to helping students learn how to learn, the goals of reading development extended to developing students’ metacognitive skills and strategies that they could in turn employ independently and across different circumstances. While the notion of independence in reading was not new, its marriage to reading comprehension was (Side comment 11 2 a 11).

Side comment III 2 a 1.

The standard was not whether or not readers could comprehend what they read, but whether or not they were strategic comprehenders. That is, were readers equipped with a repertoire of skills that enabled them to engage in a range of meaning making processes, including assessing goals, gathering relevant resources, initiating an array of strategies to generate questions, identifying and distinguishing key ideas, making connections, judging the merit of meanings gleaned, using and applying ideas, and adjusting strategies as needed (or based upon assessment of the adequacy of their pursuits).

Being a strategic reader extended and complemented the notion of a constructivist reader to address learning to read to learn—in ways that were independent and transferable (See Side comment III 2 a 2). Schema theoretic notions of reading heralded the importance of building, activating, and enlisting background knowledge. To be strategic meant developing readers’ abilities to become better comprehenders—knowing when to enlist certain strategies to enhance their learning in different situations with different texts or reading sources, as they contemplate and pursue projects, assignments etc. Befitting different situations, strategic readers are capable of setting goals and orchestrating practices that might include gathering resources, posing their own questions, enlisting forward inferencing abilities, adjusting foci and perspectives, moving

around in the text, zooming in and out, pausing, re-reading, revising, rethinking, self-correcting, and applying. They have understandings whereby they can notice features and patterns; they are engaged in knowledge building; they can chunk and situate ideas and relate these ideas to their current task. Strategic readers are also self-initiating—their approach is not lockstep but adaptive as they flexibly seek to adroitly engage ways to make meaning. They contemplate the task, the nature of their meaning making, and their deployment of strategies as they accrue understandings and in turn judge and adjust their approaches.

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Side comment III 2 a 2.

It was generally agreed that past practices were more directed at testing students comprehension than focused on ways to improve how students comprehend. They also reflected an approach to comprehension tied to mastery that ignored findings from cognition in terms of comprehension development. Further, the orientation to comprehension enhancement emphasized the provision of pre-set adjuncts to support learning. Observations of classroom reading and subject area practices suggested that reading comprehension instruction consisted primarily of teachers questioning students on what they read. The questions were purportedly based on taxonomies, such as Bloom's taxonomy; however, in practice, most questions—such as recall questions to which students responded and the teacher judged—focused on literal details. When targeted skill development did occur, it tended to require students to define textual elements, such as main idea, or draw conclusions and locate evidence in the selections that they read or in their assigned paragraphs. Unfortunately, there appeared to be a number of faulty assumptions undergirding these practices, including:

- *Comprehension ability (i.e., the student's potential) is predetermined and in accordance with mental ability—a proxy for which is the student's listening comprehension level across graded selections;*
- *Reading comprehension is a receptive act, intent on discerning the author's meaning;*
- *Comprehension proceeds sequentially, from the literal to inferential to interpretative and then critical;*
- *Acquiring the skills of comprehension involves mastering a subset of skills related to outcomes rather than developing strategies of meaning making;*
- *Reading development can be measured and reported as a grade level—as if grade level reading or a standardized score on a test is a reasonable, credible, and generalizable prediction of reading ability;*
- *Readability can be defined in accordance with the student's overall reading grade level and by what is discerned to be the difficulty level of the material (based on vocabulary and syntactical complexity).*

In a survey of over a thousand secondary students that Rob conducted with Diane Schallert, they uncovered the extent to which high schoolers approached reading in a fashion that was flawed and naïve. Most read their texts only once, often as quickly as possible and as they did so they tried to remember as much as possible. Not surprisingly, these same students complained about how tedious reading was and the poverty of their recalls. (Schallert & Tierney, 1982).

Essentially, like constructivist readers, successful strategic readers are not passive but actively engaged in a form of ongoing meaning making driven by curiosity, predictions, anticipations, self-questioning, and forward thinking. These readers engage in connecting ideas and considering patterns, themes, and the coherence and plausibility of ideas as they self-monitor, consider relevance and possibilities. Strategic readers develop “muscle memory” that

they enlist for critically reflecting on their processes for making meaning, the ideas and understandings they might glean.

Again, consistent with an emphasis upon learning to learn—or what was termed metacognition—self-monitoring skills became a focus. In the past, students were supported in terms of their comprehension with scaffolding by the teacher (by way of prompts, etc.) and encouraged to use adjunct aids, such as noticing headings and taking notes. With shift to strategic reading, this support was seen as not developing in students a repertoire of strategies that they could employ independently or transfer to other circumstances (see Clay, 1998; Tierney & Cunningham, 1984; Paris et al., 1983, 1984, 1992; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Research and development on strategies to enhance readers' awareness of their reading tasks (i.e., strategies that they might employ flexibly and selectively) took hold. In turn, a new set of strategies and heuristics for teachers were employed in an effort to help readers employ for themselves (see Tierney & Readence, 2005). For example, Donna Ogle (1986) developed KWL (i.e., what do you **know**, what do you **want** to learn, and what did you **learn**) and Taffy Raphael (1982) developed a task analysis procedure for readers called the Question Answer Relationship (QAR). Other researchers extended the strategy developments already in place. For example, Ann Marie Palincsar (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) adapted Anthony Manzo's (1969)-ReQuest (for reciprocal questioning between teacher and student) procedure, transforming it into teacher and students taking turns playing the teacher role (what they termed Reciprocal Teaching).

. Likewise, text-based approaches were suggested from flowcharts by Dansereau (1979), mapping (see Armbruster & Anderson, 1980; Schallert, Ulerick & Tierney, 1984) explicit teaching of structures (e.g., Stein & Trabasso, 1981; Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). or more author-based analyses by James Mosenthal (1984).

The ideal envisioned was a reader who could selectively and independently enlist appropriate strategies and skills (i.e., planning, researching, inquiring, formulating, contemplating, and monitoring) reflecting their reading goals and whatever reading activities they might pursue. This reader would be able to access these strategies and skills deftly and seamlessly—just as a pull-down menu provides support for digitally-based writing, video, and other projects. In essence, they would develop a repertoire of strategies that would support their

reader-based and text-based needs with different texts and goals of reading. And, as we discuss in subsequent section, they do so enlisting awareness of social, cultural and other dynamics befitting the local, global, transcultural and other contexts including overlapping digital arrays to which they attend.

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