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An Update on Study Skills: Implications for Teachers of Reading

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Educators agree that students do not develop study skill techniques incidentally. Study skills must be taught to enable students to succeed in understanding what they read in the content areas (Quandt, 1977; Cottier & Koehler, 1978). The teaching of study skills begins in the primary grades and continues through the college level. Every teacher is a teacher of study skills. Since the study skills are too important to be left to incidental learning, it is necessary that they be taught directly (Heilman, 1977; Bamman, Dawson, & McGovern, 1973).

What is meant by the term study skills? What are some methods or ideas employed in teaching the study skills? What does research tell us about study skills? And finally, based on this information, what are the implications for the remedial reading teacher?

Reference to study skills varies among writers. Sometimes the term functional reading is used; other times work-study skills or reference skills may be used. Nevertheless, there is general agreement as to the major areas involved in the reading-study skills (Wilson & Hall, 1972; Harris & Sipay, 1975; Wuanndt, 1977; Heilman, 1977). These areas include locating and organizing information using special graphics,

such as maps, charts, and graphs, and adjusting the rate of reading.

It must be remembered that the main purpose for teaching study skills is to enable students to become self-directed in order to successfully complete independent activities. Because of technological advances in our society, it would be impossible for the schools to teach students everything there is to learn. But once the students have acquired the necessary study skills, it is hoped they will be able to continue to learn independently. "An essential component of becoming a literate person is being able to use study skills effectively" (Mattleman & Blake, 1977, p. 925).

Numerous methods and ideas are employed in teaching the study skills. Herr (1977) and Heilman (1977) have devoted entire chapters to practical ideas and examples for teaching a variety of study skills at the elementary level. Adams and Harrison (1975) suggested ways of using television to teach outlining, note taking, and summarizing. Ideas for teaching children to read and interpret graphs and charts are included in the works of May and Eliot (1978), Wilson and Hall (1972), and Bond and Tinker (1973). Suggestions on how to teach outlining and summarizing to elementary children are given by Harris and Sipay (1975). Stanchfield (1977) considers reading rate an important study skill. Students need to be taught how to adjust their speed according to the content and objectives of the reading assignment. "The teacher can help students regulate their reading speed by stating clear and specific comprehension objectives, by identifying key words or figures, by pointing out topic sentences, and by calling attention to graphic aids, headings or subheadings, and summaries" (Stanchfield, 1977, p. 121).

Many authors have offered ideas on how to teach reading-study skills in the various content areas (Cassidy, 1977 & 1978; Robinson & Thomas, 1969). In other words, teachers need to instruct their students how to study and read in their various content books.

Although all children will not use only one method of study, it is suggested that a technique for sustained study be taught and practiced in the classroom.

One technique that has been widely supported is the SQ3R approach (Wilson & Hall, 1972; Hafner & Jolly, 1972; Bond & Tinker, 1973; Harris & Sipay, 1975). This study plan was developed by Robinson and the following is a summary of the procedure (Bond & Tinker, 1973, p. 31).

The symbol SQ3R stands for the steps the student takes in using the method: Survey (S) refers to glancing over the headings in a chapter to note the main points to be developed. Question (Q) refers to turning a heading into a question. And 3R denotes reading, reciting, and reviewing. Reading is done to answer the question derived from a heading. Reciting indicates that the pupil should look away from the book and try to recite the answers to his question. These steps are to be carried out for each headed section in a chapter. When a chapter has been completed in the above manner, the pupil reviews his notes for main ideas and their relationships. He tries to recite the main points under each heading.

Anderson (1978) showed that the technique of reading and formulating questions from the material is an effective method for ensuring better comprehension. The self-questioning technique provides guidelines for dividing the reading material into small units and encourages students to test themselves on how well they know the material. Students felt the method works because it helped them to distinguish the relevant from the trivial, and it facilitated recall of information. However, the students also felt the technique was time consuming and sometimes the overall picture was lost.

Research has been conducted (Monteith, 1977; Craik & Martin, 1980) to determine the effectiveness

of underlining as a study strategy. Monteith's review of the literature indicated there was no definitive answer about the effectiveness of underlining as a study skill. Craik and Martin (1980) revealed that even though students were informed about using an underlining technique which might help them with textual material, many of them did not use the suggestions.

Study skills programs at the college level also have been evaluated (Katz & Wright, 1977; Robyak, 1977 & 1978). Katz and Wright conducted a study to determine if students who were admitted into college under the open admissions policy could be helped to achieve academically after taking a communication skills course which emphasized reading, vocabulary development, and study skills such as outlining and summarizing. The results of this study showed that the effects of taking the communication skills course were short-lived. Looking at the long range effects there was no considerable difference between those students who enrolled in the course and those who did not. The data from Robyak's (1977, 1978) studies supported the idea that individual differences must be considered when setting up a program to increase a student's study skills and that behavior modification techniques should be used to solve the problems of ineffective study behavior.

Ross and DiVesta (1976) supported the use of oral summaries as a study skill strategy used by college students to help themselves review and recall textual material. After reading a passage from a text, the student verbalized what he has learned. Knowing that an oral summary was to be made, the student read more carefully and his retention of ideas was enhanced by his having presented his oral summary.

Students learn study skills by getting actively involved in using the skills being taught (Mattleman & Blake, 1977; Starks, 1980). Starks described interview and survey projects conducted by high school and college students which gave the students a chance to

use the skills they were learning in a functional setting.

Many authors have examined note taking and its effectiveness as a study skill. Aaronson (1975) provided an explanation of the two-column note taking system and stated a preference for this approach. Dunkeld (1978) demonstrated that note taking is a difficult skill to learn and that teachers must take the time to teach this skill. Cottier and Koehler (1978) designed a program to teach note taking skills to seventh and ninth grade students. The ninth graders were instructed by a team--the learning disabilities teacher, the reading specialist, and the social studies teacher. The seventh graders were instructed by only the reading teacher. The results of the study showed that, of the two methods used, the team approach seemed to be more effective. Dyer, Riley, and Yekovich (1979) examined three strategies used by college students when reading text material. The data confirmed the effectiveness of using note taking while reading text material. The rereading strategy was also effective because, like note taking, it provided the learner with additional time on task. Summarizing was not as effective a strategy as the authors predicted it might be.

Based on the information provided in this paper, the following is a list of implications for the remedial reading teacher.

- (1) Students' individual differences must be considered when planning and establishing a study skills program.
- (2) Using behavior modification techniques might prove effective in changing the study habits of some students.
- (3) Working as a team with the students' other teachers can be effective in getting students to use what they learn in the remedial reading class.

- (4) A sequential program for teaching the study skills must be planned and used.
- (5) Plan to teach and reinforce the study skills at all grade levels and in all curriculum areas.
- (6) The remedial reading teacher should be familiar with the various content area textbooks used by the students and plan study skills lessons using this material making the necessary adjustments based on reading ability.

Students must be taught these study skills at all levels and in all content areas. Every teacher can be a teacher of study skills. In conclusion, "The difference between 'A' and 'C' students may not be intelligence or even motivation, but may be how well they have mastered efficient study skills as they progress through school" (Cottier & Koehler, 1978, p. 630).

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