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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of "study reading" as used at a learning disabilities clinic at the University of Southampton, England. Study reading is defined as attentive reading to learn and remember, as different from reading that is performed simply to follow a narrative or browsing for one's own, self-set purposes. Results obtained with learning disabled students and their teachers are examined, such as accident black spots. The students are first offered a general attack plan for approaching new reading assignments. Next, the focus is on the connection between what they are reading and how they will use this new information. This task analysis gives them a clearer idea of what they are reading; it is accompanied by highlighting and note-taking. Teachers who work with these students often feel inadequate to this helping task, but it is often just a matter of working with knowledge they already have, but do not recognize. A list of teacher-helpful texts for teachers and students is appended. (Contains references.) (NAV)

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The Learning Disabilities Clinic housed within the University of Southampton School of Education provides literacy teaching and curriculum access support for pupils of secondary school age who have specific learning difficulties (SpLD). These are the pupils who are widely referred to as "dyslexic": young people of at least average intelligence with apparently anomalous reading, spelling and writing difficulties. During the twelve years the LDC has been operating, we have moved increasingly towards teaching based on the pupils' curriculum assignments from school; by now, our work is almost entirely focused in this way. Naturally, this has brought with it an intense focus on study skills, since pupils who read and write slowly need to be highly efficient in the way they employ these skills.

Over the last two years, we have done a number of short in-service courses with teachers on implementing our study skills approach within subject classrooms, and the feedback from these has made us feel our work on study skills may be relevant to a much wider group of pupils and teachers than our original client group. It seems possible that, on the one hand, confusion about what and how to teach about study skills is more widely spread than we had appreciated, and on the other, that tools developed for the acute needs of pupils with SpLD are highly likely to be efficient also for a wider range of pupils.

This paper focuses particularly on what we call "study reading". By study reading we mean attentive reading to learn and remember, as distinct from a more relaxed style appropriate to simply following a narrative or browsing for one's own, self-set purposes. Study reading is specifically reading to learn. I shall look first at some areas which have emerged from our work as "accident black spots" in our students' attempts to use reading as a tool in their learning and outline briefly some ways we have found effective in helping them. Then I shall look explicitly at some of the concerns related to study reading which arise out of our work with

teachers, both on our courses and those who work in schools as class teachers of students who attend the LDC.

The paper is intended very much in the spirit of a working paper: not a prescriptive list of things to do, but an exploration of issues, presented in the hope of eliciting response from an interested audience about the potential applicability of the ideas in other contexts.

Attacking the text

Few of our students come to us with a variety of reading styles at their command. Indeed, we count ourselves fortunate if they truly command a single style. One of the accidental outcomes of a long struggle with decoding skills seems to be a generalised impression that all true reading begins at the top left corner and carries on word by word until print ceases at some (far away) bottom right corner. Even students who read in other ways outside school (reading hobby magazines by looking at pictures and occasionally sampling the text, for example) usually revert to a "top left" style when the reading is being done for school. This is, of course, extremely inefficient, especially for a poor decoder, who needs every bit of context clue she/he can absorb in order to suppo. aking good guesses about unknown words.

One of the first study aids we offer students is, therefore, a general attack plan for tackling new reading assignments. Essentially it is encouragement to answer the question: "How much can you find out about this piece of text without reading it through?" Beyond the first response of a mystified look, students can be encouraged to find a lot of information in pictures, diagrams, headlines and titles, headings, captions, bold text, arrangement of the page. It is bleak school text indeed these days that is just lines of uniform print all over the page, and even that can be made to yield information by reading first and last paragraphs and then first and last lines of each intervening paragraph. (A panic-stricken student recently was delighted to find she could do her whole geography assignment by the last method combined with what she remembered from class. Having processed a lot of information very successfully, she asked, "Well, I did do it all myself, so do you think I need to tell them I couldn't read it?")

Making explicit the many clues available before a detailed reading helps students develop an internalised list of things to look for and where to look. It gives specific meaning to the term "skimming" which is much-listed among reading skills and rarely defined in sufficient practical detail to be really useful. (A notable exception is Grellet, 1981.) Using these pointers helps a pupil engage from the beginning with the content of the reading and, as a by-product, activates any relevant background knowledge. And it puts all this within the reach of the students who need it most: those who are "poor readers" in some way, who by definition will not have time to read a passage several times or will gain little from doing so.

Task analysis: Why am I reading this?

The second big gap we find in our students' approach to study reading is their general failure to relate the focus of their reading to what they are eventually going to do with the information they will gain from reading. Other teaching experiences of ours as well as reports from teachers on our INSET courses indicate this problem extends well beyond the group of students with whom we typically work at the Clinic. The best students at GCSE level read purposefully with a firm idea of collecting material relevant to a particular aim, perhaps finding facts about a topic, preparing an argument, or tracing a sequence of events. Moving down the age or performance ladder, this becomes correspondingly more rare. Far too few students take "read this carefully" as anything other than reading each word in order and trying to remember them all.

To some extent for our students this is related to poor grasp of what the eventual aim of the reading actually is, even when the teacher thinks he/she has made this clear. Much school reading is related to writing tasks, and our students, as poor writers as well as poor readers, may well have little experience of completing writing assignments satisfactorily. "Write an essay about..." may, in practice, mean "get down a few things related to the topic using words you can spell and be sure you have some full stops in it". This hardly provides an adequate guide for selective reading and reprocessing! Even reading to answer a set of questions is complicated by the fact that questions are often used by teachers both to

check present comprehension and to produce a readable record of information for future revision. A student who fails to grasp this may be mystified by the teacher's insistence that succinct expression of individual facts produces inadequate answers. Several experiences later, this misunderstanding can be one of the causes of students' insistence that our advice to read the questions before reading the passage is cheating. A further difficulty in relating reading to task arises when the task is not defined at the time the reading is assigned. This may be for what seem good and sufficient reasons to the teacher. Perhaps several aspects of a topic are to be explored and then combined in one writing assignment. Or perhaps the reading assignment is long, such as a novel, and there may later be a choice of several tasks. Or perhaps the teacher does not want to over-direct the students' initial response to the reading. Whatever the reason, the effect for many readers in the class will be to leave them rudderless as they read. (It is worth noting that the school context is sufficient clue so that the most sophisticated students will tend to assume a related writing task to come and begin a kind of "underground" preparation as they read in any case.)

Since our Clinic students are almost always in the highly vulnerable group of readers - either very slow or poor comprehenders or both - we have found it useful to stress what we call Task Analysis as a key part of our study skills teaching. Before they start detailed reading we get students to ask - and answer! - the question: "What, exactly, am I going to have to do about this when I have finished reading it?" Students need help to learn to make the answer to this question explicit and detailed. "Make some notes" is not sufficient and will elicit two further questions: Why? and In what form? A student who can answer these two questions has gone a long way down the road to turning a vague, global task ("Read this for homework") into a well-defined action plan which will make for active, effective reading.

To deal usefully with the realities of school assignments, task analysis needs to be quite sophisticated, and students cannot be expected to do it effectively based on a single experience. For example, they need to realise there may be several levels of reason for setting a writing task and the reading style needs to be appropriate to them all. And where no task has

yet been set, we help students learn to ask, "Why would the teacher have asked me to read this? What does it have to do with what we are doing in class? What work might we have to do related to it?" Many become surprisingly good at this, showing great perception about the kinds of assignments particular teachers favour.

Notes and highlights

Few of our students can be consistently active, engaged readers unless they are doing something about the text they are reading. Task analysis helps by giving them a clear idea of what they are looking for, but many easily drift off once they begin the difficult process of decoding the core of the text. In addition, they are likely to need a quick way to check back over text they have read to review points or select material to learn. Both these factors lead us towards activities involving photocopying and marking the text or making notes as ways of focusing on the extraction of particular information from the text as they read.

Highlighting is probably the easiest form of text selection for students to grasp and has the huge advantage of not requiring additional writing, at least immediately. Many students enjoy using colours and the technique is generally seen as "grown up", which makes it acceptable in the classroom. Set against these advantages, we have found it easy for students (and some teachers) to see highlighting as a panacea. Dazzled by the colours and, perhaps, the success of a first attempt, they latch on to an unsophisticated use of the technique and are disappointed when it proves ill-suited to later circumstances and the student seems to make no further progress.

Note making of any sort, including highlighting, involves re-processing the content of the text in the light of particular criteria. As such, it is a complex process. Students need to know that there are different styles of notes and that a decision needs to be made between them. This decision depends on at least three factors: the type of text, the student's own preference, and the eventual use to which the notes will be put. Balancing these involves both knowledge and thought, and choosing effectively usually involves a good bit of experience as well. One of the things we try

to do for our students is help them acquire relevant experience fairly quickly, but they also need encouragement to be flexible. We stress the difference between a technique and a strategy. A technique is a specialised bit of knowledge about how to do something - for example, using a flow chart to make notes. To turn it into a strategy, the student must choose from a selection of techniques the one which will suit his or her purpose of the moment.

A look at a list of the types of note-making we cover in the course of a year with our older students will suggest the range of experience which can be made available.

* highlighting by specific criteria
* titling paragraphs
* outlining
* flow chart
* charts, tables and matrices
* "spider" diagram or idea map
* headings followed by lists
* key questions
* summaries
* time line
* cartoon strip
* diagram plus key word list

And there are many more, and variations on each, which will arise by-the-by as work comes in from school.

This may seem to have strayed from the subject of reading, but in fact it appears to be highly relevant from the students' point of view. Again and again we find students' comprehension and ability to use information from text climbs steadily upward once they begin to use a sequenced approach of getting a general overview, analysing the task(s) in hand, choosing a recording/note-making style, and then reading in detail. The inter-relationship between appreciating text structure and choice of note-

making style is a close one, and students who are conscious of this do a better job with both.

On finding the way ...

Many of the teachers who come on our courses or work with our students in school are uneasy because they say they feel their own grasp of techniques for study reading is too vague to allow them to help their students effectively. Our experience is that there are two answers to this, each of them partially effective.

The first is that teachers usually have more knowledge than they think they have to draw on. Almost all teachers have to be effective readers to get to be teachers, but most of them have become so automatic about how they do it that they find it hard to realize what they do. Real reflection as they tackle a reading task at their own level, continually asking themselves, "How did I know that? What cues am I using? Why do I do it that way?", will unearth many useful clues to pass on to students. Secondly, there are some very useful books which can be turned to good account by teachers interested in helping students grow in their ability to manage texts. Some that we have found useful are listed at the end of this paper for readers who may not know them already.

One secret of helping students seems to be raising their awareness of study reading as a process that can be learnt and practised, and at which they can gradually improve. To foster this, teachers certainly need to have some specialised knowledge of techniques which can be passed on. They also need to help students see the strategic elements in the process - the need to choose a way of working to match the task, for instance. Many of our students are amazed to learn that even expert readers have to make decisions about how to make notes in particular cases; they seem to think that for all the world except themselves, a magic "right" answer pops up as soon as the problem presents itself. To expose this decision making is the first step in helping students master it.

Helping students toward effective study reading must be a long-term job. No one teacher can do it in one year for all students in a class. On the other

hand, the years of middle and secondary schooling are focused on learning from text to a degree that for most of the population will never be met again during their lives. If a substantial section of every group of children is not to underperform - or worse yet, feel a failure - during those years, it seems important that we pay explicit attention to this aspect of learning to read.

Bibliography: Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTS)

DARTS activities focus on analysis and reprocessing of text as a way of helping readers fully understand what they read and are thus related to study reading as defined in this paper. Even children who need help in decoding the passages will gain confidence and understanding from undertaking this work.

For teachers

Brown A L and A S Palincsar (1987) "Reciprocal teaching of comprehension strategies: A natural history of one program for enhancing learning" in Day & Borkowski (eds.) *Intelligence and exceptionality: New directions for theory, assessment and instructional practices*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex - study of children learning effective reading by learning to teach each other.

Bulman L (1985) *Teaching Language and Study Skills in Secondary Science*, London: Heinemann Educational - covers a wide range of study skills, many of them focused on text.

Culshaw C & D Waters (1984 and ongoing) *Headwork series* Oxford: Oxford University Press - for many examples of how work can be set out which can be easily adapted for note making in any subject context.

Grellet F (1981) *Developing Reading Skills*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press - for a wide variety of approaches to studying text, with many specific examples appropriate to classroom subjects. An excellent introduction on the principles of designing reading comprehension exercises.

Lunzer E and K Gardner (1984) *Learning from the Written Word*, Edinburgh: Schools Council / Oliver and Boyd - for the principles underlying this approach to study reading, and many detailed examples at the teacher's level.

McKeown S (ed.) (1983) *Effective Learning Skills*, London: ILEA - for good examples of note-making strategies with an emphasis on visual presentation and reformulation of information.

For work with pupils (eventually, any text can be adapted, but these books offer starting points.)

Gardner K (1984) *Study Reading, Books 1 & 2*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - texts with wide variety of related tasks requiring thought and reprocessing, rather than much writing.

Kilpatrick A, P McCall and S Palmer (1982) *I See What You Mean, Vols. 1 & 2*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - short samples of text which lead students towards graphic modelling of ideas; middle/lower secondary level.

Niven C (1980) *Study Skills 2 and 3*, Glasgow & London: Collins - workbooks, short passages with questions that cannot be answered by copying. (Book 1 on *Finding Information* is also useful.)

Sheldon S (1990) *Show Me. Tell Me*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - lots of good examples of alternative display, well-presented for middle school age-group.

Smith G & B Rasmusen (1985) *Context Reading, Books 1-4* , Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd - intended for whole class use at junior school level. Rather long passages but wide variety of activities. Associated work sheets.