

Strategies in Teaching Paired Reading with Content Courses

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Students derive more benefits from attending developmental reading courses that are an integral part of the academic curricula (Maxwell, 1997). Colleges that pair their developmental reading courses with content courses achieve the objective of integrating the developmental courses into the academic curricula. This article describes the model and strategies Kean University implemented in order to pair its developmental reading and academic courses.

College students frequently exhibit negative attitudes toward attending developmental reading courses for a number of reasons. Some students believe that they actually read well, and argue that the results of their placement tests are inaccurate. Others resent paying tuition and completing assignments for non-credit courses. Some acknowledge that their reading skills need improvement, but they either dislike reading or feel stigmatized by having to attend remedial-type courses. Often students do not realize that mastery of the skills taught in developmental reading classes is vital for success in their academic courses, and they look upon developmental reading as a waste of time.

Research suggests that students derive more benefits from attending developmental reading courses that are paired with academic courses. In several studies and articles, the paired model was associated with higher academic achievement and more positive attitudes towards reading and attending developmental classes. Bullock, Madden and Harter (1987) reported that students enrolled in a paired developmental reading course with psychology performed significantly better on the Degrees of Reading Power test than their non-paired counterparts. After comparing the achievement of students enrolled in paired reading and writing courses with students enrolled in unpaired reading and writing courses, McKusick, Holmberg, Marello and Little (1997) concluded that the students enrolled in the paired courses demonstrated more dramatic growth in reading on a standard test than students enrolled in separate reading and writing courses. In a study examining the achievement of students enrolled in ethics and values courses paired with reading courses, Byrd

and Carter (1997) found that the students enrolled in the paired courses scored higher on exams than students enrolled in non-paired sections.

A number of studies compared the attitudes and retention rates of developmental reading students enrolled in paired courses with the attitudes and retention rates of developmental reading students enrolled in the stand-alone reading courses. Rey and Karstadt (2004) found that students enrolled in paired reading courses expressed more positive reactions about being placed in developmental reading classes and reported more satisfaction with their coursework. The students in the paired courses also placed greater importance on the value of reading in college. Simon (2000) reported that a College and Reading Skill course has been paired with American History, Psychology, Financial Accounting and Macro Economics. Students in these paired courses earned higher grades and had higher rates of course completion than students enrolled in these courses in the non-paired setting.

IMPLEMENTING A PAIRED READING PROGRAM

To improve its developmental reading program, Kean University adopted the paired-course model for its Introduction to Academic Reading course. Initially, two sections of this reading course were paired with Health over a period of one year.

Currently, each section of Introduction to Academic Reading is paired with one of the following courses: psychology, sociology, philosophy, theater, anthropology, women's issues, or economics.

COMMUNICATION WITH PAIRED COURSE FACULTY

For developmental reading instruction to succeed, Simpson (1997) warned that instructors involved in academic assistance must be familiar with the academic demands their students face in their content courses. In the paired courses at Kean University, the researchers found it essential that the developmental reading instructors and the academic content professors communicate with each other. Throughout the semester, the paired instructors communicated by email, telephone, personal meetings, and the exchange of notes and letters. At the beginning of the semester a developmental reading instructor sent the following note to the course content professor:

I teach CS 0412-Introduction to Academic Reading that is paired with Introduction to Psychology. I plan to use the psychology book and related materials for applications of the reading skills and strategies that I teach in CS 0412. I also plan to include reading activities

that could help students complete assignments in psychology. I look forward to hearing or meeting with you if you have any questions.

USING THE COURSE CONTENT SYLLABUS

At the beginning of each semester, each developmental reading instructor receives a syllabus from the academic content professor with whom the course is paired. The developmental reading instructor reviews the syllabus in order to become familiar with the academic course content and determine appropriate reading skills to support it. In the following example, a developmental reading instructor prepares students for an assignment contained in a health syllabus.

The reading instructor discusses with the students the reading skills and tasks needed to complete the assignment. The underlined words show the actions that the students must take. For this assignment, students could apply reading strategies and skills such as identifying the main idea and supporting details, outlining, summarizing, describing details, stating opinions, and supporting a belief.

You are to choose three articles for each health care topic. You should read and summarize each article in a brief one page narrative report. You should describe how you feel about the topic and the relevance to modern health care (Nixon, 2004).

TEACHING STRATEGIES

In the paired course model, students acquire reading and study skills in the reading course. Then they directly apply these skills in their content course textbooks. The examples that follow illustrate how students apply these skills in course content textbooks.

In the following vocabulary lesson, the developmental reading instructor demonstrates strategies to help students understand and remember vocabulary words in a health textbook. The students are instructed to examine prefixes, roots and suffixes.

In the example below, the word, psychoactive is composed of “psycho” and “active.” Students’ concepts of psycho-mind and active will help them remember the effects of psychoactive drugs. Many students may already be familiar with “prescription,” medicine obtained from a doctor.

Psychoactive drugs - Drugs that have the potential to alter mood or behavior.
Prescription drugs - Medications that can be obtained only with the written prescription of the physician (Donatelle, 2005).

The next example demonstrates how transition words are used in

economics. The words *although* and *whereas* help students understand that two types of insurance are being differentiated.

Although the basic purpose of the two kinds of insurance is the same, they differ in most other characteristics. Social insurance is compulsory, whereas private insurance is voluntary. If you are a covered worker, you must pay social security taxes and participate in the program; no one requires that you purchase a private insurance policy (Brux & Cowen, 2002).

In this lesson, the reading instructor demonstrates strategies for identifying the main idea and supporting details. The skill is then applied in a reading selection on emerging values taken from a sociology textbook. Although this example does not show all the values, students who have acquired these reading skills will be able to predict that there are five core values emerging in the United States.

A value cluster of four interrelated core values—leisure, self-fulfillment, physical fitness and youthfulness is emerging in the United States. A fifth core value—concern for the environment—is also encouraging

- 1. Leisure. The emergence of leisure as a value is reflected in a huge recreation industry—from computer games, boats, and motor homes to sports arenas, vacation homes, and travel and vacation services.*
- 2. Self-fulfillment. This value is reflected in the “human potential” movement, which involves becoming “all one can be,” and in books and talk shows that focus on self-help,” “relating” and personal development (Henslin, 2005).*

CONCLUSION

Kean University paired its developmental reading courses with academic content courses in order to give its developmental reading students the opportunity to apply the skills and strategies they learned in their reading class directly to their academic coursework. The developmental reading instructors and the academic professors collaborated and shared information about course content, teaching strategies and their students’ progress. The developmental reading instructors used the syllabi and textbooks from the paired content courses to help them determine which topics and reading skills and strategies to teach their students.

The article describes how the paired reading model was implemented. It includes examples of strategies used to help students apply reading skills to academic readings in order to help them understand their textbooks, complete class assignments and projects, and respond to discussion questions.

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