NADE Members Respond

Best Practices and Challenges in Integrated Reading and Writing: A Survey of Field Professionals, Part 2

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This is the second of a two-part column that reports the results of a qualitative study of instructors and their implementation of Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) courses. The study participants include members of the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) and had attended an IRW professional development event at the NADE 2015 annual conference. The methods of the study and a listing and discussion of the most frequently cited challenges to teaching IRW courses have been offered in part one (Saxon, Martirosyan, & Vick, 2016). A listing and discussion of the most popular strategies applied in teaching IRW courses are described here along with some general discussion and conclusions.

Results

Group Work

The highest ranking instructional strategy by survey participants was the use of group work. The following details about this strategy were offered:

- Group activities are administered that are first modeled.
- Students are engaged in group work.
- Students learn through collaborative activities.
- Collaborative groups are applied to promote processing text more deeply.
- Peer review groups are employed with structured response sheet prompts.

This strategy was supported by the results of a phenomenological qualitative study of five developmental English instructors who teach IRW at a community college in Northeastern North Carolina (Vick, 2015). Vick (2015) identified the use of an active learning environment with an emphasis on collaborative learning as a featured pedagogical approach. One specific collaborative activity referenced by an instructor in the study was the construction of a paragraph completed in small groups based on a previously assigned reading. A collaborative atmosphere could be more engaging for students (Vick). Boylan (2002) also cited collaborative learning as one of several instructional techniques that are important in working with developmental education students.

Apply the Same Topic for Reading and Writing

The second highest ranking strategy offered by participants was the use of the same topic across the instruction of reading and writing. Participants elaborated with the following comments:

- Students read a passage, annotate the text, answer comprehension questions, and then write an essay based on ideas in the passage.
- Students use one topic for both reading and writing, and then really engage with that topic in a meaningful way.
- Article reviews are required with a summary and response.
- Reading and writing assignments are linked thematically.
- Students are always writing about the reading that they do.
- I teach strategies for identifying main ideas in readings. Then, students practice writing a topic sentence or thesis statement for their essays and paragraphs.
- All students read the same novel, and the class uses that to study reading and writing.

Considering the ways in which reading and writing complement each other as disciplines offers instructors opportunities for creativity in terms of selection for reading content and subsequent writing assignments (DuBrowa, 2011). For example, DuBrowa (2011) shared specific examples including the use of a *Sports Illustrated* article dealing with overcoming adversity and the use of a recipe for a food dish. Both of these readings involved writing assignments and incorporated lively class discussions. According to DuBrowa, "Integrating reading and writing is more a logistical challenge than an academic problem" (p. 32). Indeed, engaging reading selections has been used as exploratory ways to involve students in the writing process.

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Technology Applications

The third most commonly cited instructional strategy in IRW courses was the application of technology. The following were offered as examples:

- Supplemental grammar instruction is offered via computer software.
- The program uses a computerized support system.
- Open labs are available for students needing extra help, especially with writing.
- Tutoring is available in the computer lab.
- An online lab component is integrated.
- Students consume and produce "texts" in a variety of venues: print, audio, video, graphics, and animation.

Though no literature could be located that described the effective use of technology specifically in support of IRW instruction, some general considerations about the application of technology to developmental instruction follow. A recent study on instructional technology practices in developmental education in Texas revealed that the use of online resources and tools, including various commercial software (e.g., MyWritingLab™ and MyReadingLab™), were popular in developmental education classrooms (Martirosyan, Kennon, Saxon, Edmonson, & Skidmore, 2015). The majority (84.4%) of the participants

(N = 890) reported the use of some form of technology in their classrooms to supplement instruction. It therefore seems that technology may also be a prevalent tool to assist in IRW courses.

However, Boylan (2002) recommends that instructional technology be used in moderation. He cites an inverse relationship among students passing developmental courses and the intensity of the application of technology in those courses. As technology becomes the primary means of delivering instruction, fewer students succeed. This suggests that course designers and instructors understand the limitations of instructional technology.

Classroom Discussions

The fourth most cited instructional strategy applied was classroom discussion. This strategy was described in the following ways:

- Students are engaged in discussions and summarizing the readings.
- Discussions are led using a social constructivist approach.
- Guided group discussions are held.
- Classroom debates are conducted that lead into the essay topic.

Liza Daily and Janis Innis (n.d.), developmental English professors at Houston Community College, developed a teaching manual focused on classroom strategies for developmental English. In this manual, Daily and Innis described class discussions as instructor-led and instructor-controlled. They contended that discussions offered students an opportunity to explore a particular subject through questioning and by sharing opinions or experiences. Classroom discussions are also helpful for engaging students and promoting critical thinking (Vick, 2015).

Modeling

The fifth ranking IRW teaching strategy was the use of modeling. The following descriptions were offered:

- Students write one essay with no instruction. Then, the process is modeled and I conference with students at each phase of the writing process. The last essay they write on their own.
- The students are offered modeling on how to write an essay.
- Sentence modeling is done. Sentences from the readings are used to show students how to write effective sentences.

Daily and Ennis (n.d.) described modeling as a step-by-step approach for teaching and regard this type of practice as an effective approach for retention. In a modeling approach, the students should practice the desired skill either simultaneously or immediately after the instructor models the skill (Daily & Ennis, n.d.). In addition to modeling writing techniques, instructors might also incorporate the modeling of self-regulation techniques for students. Some examples of behaviors to model may include goal setting, self-evaluation of writing skills, and time management (MacArthur, Philippakos, & Ianetta, 2015).

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Discussion

Developmental education is in a state of change and disruption. The impetus to reform and redesign practice is backed by well-funded nonprofit groups and policy makers who may mean well. However, broad scale improvements seem elusive (Saxon & Boylan, 2011). IRW is promoted as a popular form of accelerating and redesigning the delivery of developmental education courses, and the trend toward deploying this model of instruction will likely continue. Though the model is touted as a better means of structuring and teaching underprepared students (Edgecombe, Jaggars, Xu, & Barragan, 2014), there are few efficacy studies in this particular area available to affirm this assertion. Practitioners and scholars understand that along with change must come disciplined inquiry. Therefore, the resulting practice and performance of students participating in these course offerings provide an opportunity for practical research. A logical focal point for much of this research is the faculty. They are charged with adapting their instruction and contributing to the design and implementation of IRW courses. Their engagement and input will be vital to the improvement and success of the model.

Conclusion

The findings from this study offered the perspective of faculty on the challenges faced when deploying IRW courses. This information may serve as a caveat to administrative decision makers as the IRW model is considered as a developmental education option. Administrators mandating reform that includes IRW course structures should understand and attempt to address these challenges. The faculty participating in this study also offered teaching strategies that they have typically used in IRW classes. These ideas may offer a starting point for instructors who are recruited to teach in the context of the IRW model. As IRW courses are more widely deployed, research such as this will serve to inform practice and support faculty in their instruction. The IRW model is unlikely a panacea for developmental education, but it seems to show promise for some students (Edgecombe et al., 2014).

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