

Effects of Engaging Students in a Remedial Reading Course

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Introduction

Every year, millions of new college students come academically underprepared. They lack the necessary skills to perform at the college level. Postsecondary institutions address this problem with extensive remedial programs (Chen, 2016). One of these remedial programs is reading. In several postsecondary institutions, students are required to pass a remedial reading course in order to take some credit bearing courses.

I teach a remedial reading course. In the beginning of the term, some students show a negative attitude toward attending this course for different reasons. These include the belief that the result of the reading placement test is inaccurate, feeling of being stigmatized for having to attend a remedial course (Rey & Karstadt, 2006), and the frustration for not getting college credits and paying tuition for attending this course (Bettinger & Long, 2007 & Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). In spite of these situations, students have to take and pass this remedial course.

Engaging Practices

In teaching a remedial reading course, I provide students with activities that enable them to apply strategies to improve their reading as well as other skills that help them to become academically prepared. I find these practices helpful in engaging them to think critically, perceive their strengths and needs to understand what they read, and take steps to address their concerns. These practices also help students to work on assignments that further improve their reading skills, work cooperatively with others, realize the relevance of what they learn to other college courses, and improve their attitude toward a remedial reading course.

News Articles

Students orally share their news articles every other week. In the first 2 months, they share current local,

regional, national or international news. In presenting the article from memory, they include information that answers the following questions.

1. What happened?
2. Who made it happen?
3. Why did it happen?
4. When did it happen?
5. Where did it happen?
6. How did it happen?

Students are discouraged from sharing news about murders and gossips. In the 3rd and 4th months, students are encouraged to share news that are related to their intended major. Sharing news articles from memory helps students to improve their comprehension, retention, and oral communication skills. They are encouraged to speak in their seats or in front of the class. They also improve their listening comprehension skills because a discussion about the content of the news and their insights follows after the sharing period. For example, students realize the negative effects of littering and using plastic materials after hearing news about flooding due to clogged canals and a dead whale with tons of these materials in the stomach.

Journal Report: Informational Texts

After a discussion about the strategies for inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words and recognizing the main idea, supporting details, and paragraph patterns in passages, students write a journal report. They choose any article (not news) from Times, Newsweek, scholarly journals, or any informative magazine in print or digital. that is related to Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, Economics, Health, Social Justice, Anthropology, or any college course They attach a copy of the article that must consist of at least 2 pages. They also write a summary that includes a minimum of 10 logical sentences that are based on the entire article, a thesis statement, and relevant supporting details. Additionally, they include answers to given

questions and details that support their answers. Finally, they write the meanings of 5 vocabulary words that are found in the article and use these in sentences. The journal report guide is found in Appendix A (Rey, 2017). Preparing a journal report enables students to improve their skills of inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words, identifying the main idea, providing details to support the main idea, sensing relationships among ideas, recognizing paragraph patterns, summarizing, and realizing the importance of the skills that they acquire in a remedial reading course.

Journal Report: Inspirational Stories

Students choose any story or featured article (not news article) that could motivate a person to pursue a goal; change one's negative perspective to a positive one; propel someone to be hopeful in spite of adversity; or encourage an individual to appreciate one's talents, skills, position, work, physical status, or financial capability. They choose an article with at least

2 pages from any newspaper, magazine or online sources. They attach a copy of the article to a journal report that includes a summary and answers to 5 questions. The answer to every question is followed by at least 4 relevant supports. A copy of the reader response journal guide is found in Appendix B (Rey, 2017). Students enjoy presenting their inspirational stories in class and sharing their insights or lessons from these stories. Writing a journal response to every question improves students' ability in supporting their point with relevant and logical details. Some of their comments include their appreciation for what they have; desire to do their best in different situations; admiration for people who share their time, money, resources, and talents with others; and additional knowledge about people from different walks of life.

Journal Report: Short Story or Novel

After a discussion of story elements such as characters, setting, theme, plot, and point of view, students write a summary that consists of at least fifteen logical sentences that show the beginning, middle and end of the story and clearly reflects the story elements. They also answer five questions and provide supports for their answers. The guide to the story journal report is shown in Appendix C. Completing this journal report and orally sharing the summary of a story in

class help students to recognize the elements of a story, write a main idea and supporting details, improve vocabulary, written, and oral communication skills, and read for pleasure or entertainment.

Completing Arguments

After discussing the point and supports in an argument, students work in groups and provide clear, accurate, and relevant supports to one of the following points (Rey, 2017).

1. We should use solar energy as a source of electricity.
2. The quest for a healthy body can lead to unpleasant situations.
3. The death penalty is a vital tool in the fight against crime.
4. Education is a key to personal success.

This activity enables students to recognize the parts of an argument; provides clear, accurate, and relevant supports to an argument; communicate ideas; and work cooperatively in groups.

Conclusions

Engaging students who attend a remedial reading course helps them in various ways. They recognize their strengths and needs relating to reading by applying different reading skills in various activities such as sharing news articles; writing journal reports on an informational text that is related to any college course that they take during the term, an inspirational story, and a novel or a short story; and working cooperatively with others in forming arguments. These activities also enable them to think critically and to use appropriate strategies to better understand what they read. These further improve their ability to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words, recognize the main idea and supporting details, connect ideas in sentences and paragraphs, summarize a passage or a story, infer implied ideas, recognize paragraph patterns, distinguish facts from opinions, and construct arguments. These skills help students to be career and college ready (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). They respond to what they read in oral and written forms and work cooperatively with classmates. Responding to texts is beneficial to students (Becker, 1999; Blue, 2012; Brooks & Browne, 2012; Galda, &

Beach, 2001; McIntosh, 2010; Rey, Kastner, Young, & Schuman, 2013; & Rosenblatt, 1982). Finally, they see the relevance of what they learn in a remedial reading course to disciplinary literacy

I continue to look for more resources and engage college students in activities that will help them to improve their reading skills, to apply these skills in meeting the reading demands in different disciplines, and to realize the importance of attending a remedial reading course.

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Appendix A

Reading Journal Guide (Informational Text)

Name _____ Date Submitted _____ Date Due _____

Title of Article: _____ Date of Publication: _____

Source of Publication _____

- I. Choose any article (not news) from Times, Newsweek, or any informative magazine or online sources. The article must be related to Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, Economics, Health, Social Justice, Anthropology, and other college courses. The article must consist of two pages or more. Attach a copy of the article. **(5 points)**
- II. Summary - Write a summary with at least ten sentences. Be sure your summary is based on the entire article. It must have a thesis statement and relevant supporting details. **(10 points)**
- III. Comments - Discuss your feelings, reactions, or beliefs about the article. Answer five questions from the list. The discussion of your answers should have at least 5 paragraphs—one paragraph for your answer and 4 supports to your answer **(20 points)**
 - A. What did you feel while reading the article? Describe your feelings.
 - B. What were you reminded of while reading it? Discuss it.
 - C. Why did you choose this for your journal?
 - D. What did you learn from this article? Is it important to you? Explain.
 - E. What questions do you want to ask the author of the article? Why?
 - F. What part of the article strikes you? Discuss it.
 - G. Have you read something similar to this? In what way is it the same or somehow related to the article?
 - I. Have you seen or heard something related to the article? Discuss it.
 - J. After reading this, is there a change in your established beliefs? Explain.
 - K. Do you think other people should read this? Why or why not?
 - L. Is it good that you read this article? Why or why not?
- IV. Vocabulary Choose five words in the article. You may include unfamiliar words. Using the dictionary, write the meaning of each word. Be sure the meaning is similar to the way it is used in the article. Underline the 5 words on the copy of the article that you are required to attach. **(5 points)**
- V. Sentences: Write your own sentence for each word. The sentence is satisfactory if it makes sense and gives clues to the meaning of the word. **(5 points)**

Grammar & Spelling **(5 points)**

An assignment that does not adhere to the above-mentioned guidelines will be downgraded. The highest grade for an assignment that is submitted after a week is 70 % or C. An assignment that is submitted after two weeks that it is due will not be accepted. The grade is Unsatisfactory. .

Total Points _____ /50 = _____ Letter Grade _____

Appendix B
Reading Journal Guide (Inspirational Article/Story)

Name _____ Date Due: _____ Date Submitted: _____

I. Choose any story or featured article (not news article) that could inspire someone. You may use any newspaper, magazine, scholarly journal in print or digital. The article must consist of at least two pages. Attach a copy of the article. **(5 points)**

Write a report that includes the following: Title of the Article, Author, Date of Publication, Website address or title of magazine or newspaper

II. Summary: Write a summary based on the article. The pattern of organization of your summary must be the same as the pattern of the article. There must be ten or more logical sentences. **(10 points)**

III. Comments: Answer the following questions.

The discussion of your answers should have at least 5 paragraphs. Write at least 1 paragraph that includes your answer to every question and 4 supporting details. **(30 points)**

Questions:

A. Why did you choose this article?

B. What did you feel while reading this article? Why?

C. After reading this article, is there a change in your beliefs? Why or why not?

D. Do you think other people should read this? Why?

E. How did reading this article change your attitude toward reading inspirational stories or articles? Explain.

The journal report must be typed and must be submitted on time. Use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation marks **(5 points)**.

An assignment that does not adhere to the above-mentioned guidelines will be downgraded. The highest grade for an assignment that is submitted after a week is 70 % or C. An assignment that is submitted after two weeks that it is due will not be accepted. The grade is Unsatisfactory or 0%.

Total Points _____ /50 = _____ Letter Grade _____

Appendix C**Journal Report Guide (Short Story or Novel)**

I. Read any novel or a short story. Write a journal report that includes the following information.

Name _____ Course & Section _____

Date Due: _____ Date Submitted _____

Title of the book/story, author, date of publication and publishing company or source

Attach a copy of the short story or the first page of the novel. The short story must consist of at least five pages. **(5 points)**

II Story elements: Identify the story elements in the novel or short story that you have chosen.

Write your answers for the following: **(10 points)**

A. Character/s

1. Protagonist

2. Antagonist

B. Setting

C. Theme

D. Conflict/problem

Solution to the problem

E. Point of View

A book/story that does not show the elements is not appropriate for this assignment.

III. Summary: Write a summary of the novel or short story that includes at least fifteen logical and sequential sentences that show the beginning, middle and end of the story. The summary must also show clearly the problem and its resolution. **(10 points)**

IV. Comments: Write at least one paragraph to answer every question below. Include a main point and four relevant supporting details for each answer-main point. **(15 points)**

A. What did you feel while reading the story? Describe your feelings.

B. What were you reminded of while reading it? Discuss it.

C. Why did you choose this for your assignment?

D. What did you learn from this story? Is it important to you? Explain.

E. What part of the story strikes you? Discuss it.

V. Vocabulary: Choose five words, preferably unfamiliar ones, in the story. Write the meanings of these words.

Be sure the meaning that you get from the dictionary is similar to the connotation of the word that is used in the story or novel.. **(5 points)**

Grammar, Spelling & Punctuation marks **(5 points)**

Total Score _____/50 = _____% Letter Grade _____