STRATEGIES AND QUESTIONS FOR SELF-DIRECTED CONTENT READING

One of the most beneficial tools any reader can use is strategies for controlling progress of and for ensuring success in reading. English Language Learners need to develop the process of regulating their reading in order to meaningfully prioritize what they are learning. This self-directed awareness, called metacognition, is the subject of this Bulletin. Four types of strategies to informally measure reading progress will be discussed, and associated questioning prompts will be provided to help students self-regulate their reading.

METACOGNITION: THE PROCESS OF SELF-DIRECTED READING

Exercising metacognitive control over the information that one reads involves the general "how to" of reading: how to decode words; how to skim; how to scan; how to summarize; and how to preview. In addition, it involves the specific "how to" of reading: how to recognize important versus unimportant details; how to find the main idea of a paragraph or large sections of a text; how to differentiate between fact and opinion; how to make inferences about content; how to critically evaluate content; how to realize author's purpose; how to determine the accuracy of information that is read; how to adjust reading rate relative to reading purpose; and how to use a variety of graphic organizers in texts to clarify and expand meaning.

In addition, reading includes the "when and why" of reading, i.e., knowing when to use a strategy and why one strategy is better than another in reading. Thus, the demands and purposes of a reading will determine which of the following strategies to use.

STRATEGIES AND QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REGULATED READING

1. Planning Strategies. Self-directed reading involves the process of planning before reading. Planning strategies involve identifying the purpose of the task, deciding before reading to focus on particular aspects, activating background knowledge, and focusing on key words, phrases, and ideas.

Here are some questions which can be asked to help readers plan:

- What information am I looking for?
- What do I already know about this?
- What do I need to know in order to understand this?
- Do I have the necessary resource(s) to help me if I don't comprehend?
2. Monitoring Strategies. Monitoring strategies involve the process of examining one's comprehension while reading. They can be practiced by asking students to make a point of thinking out loud. Monitoring involves checking understanding and production to keep track of progress and identifying problems and relating information to personal experience or known information.

Here are some questions which can help students monitor their reading:

Is it central or peripheral to what I need to know?

What connections can I make with what I already know?

What can I describe about what I have read thus far?

What is this information a larger part of?

3. Problem-Solving Strategies. Self-directed reading also involves seeking clarity while reading by using problem-solving strategies. These strategies involve acknowledging that what is important is not known and actively finding ways to seek clarification. They involve seeking help from others, making guesses based on prior knowledge, and keeping focused about what is and is not important to know.

Here are some questions which can help students problem-solve:

Is what I don't understand language-related? content-related?

Can I relate this information to anything I already know?

Will guessing or predicting help?

Can writing down key words or concepts help me to understand?

What resource(s) can I use to help me clarify what I don't know?

4. Evaluating Strategies. Finally, self-directed reading involves checking whether guesses or predictions are correct and how well the information is being learned after reading. Evaluating strategies involve checking out whether predictions/guesses were correct; creating a mental, oral, or written summary of the information; and reflecting on progress being made in reading.

Here are some questions which can help students evaluate their reading:

What do I remember?

What are the important ideas in what I have read? Supporting ideas?

What else would I like/need to know?

Do I need to review what I have read?

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

1. As in any new behavior, practice is important, especially for English Language Learners. Modeling the questions for readers is the first step. The goal is to enable learners to automatically and independently use the strategies and questions as they read.

2. It is important to keep in mind that students' home culture values may cause them to be reluctant responders without specific, patient, focused questioning and sufficient wait time by the teacher. Unanswered questions may need rephrasing or simplification so that English Language Learners will comprehend and thus be encouraged to become more aware of how they read and how they understand what they read.

3. Preparing a script of written questions for students to follow as they read can be a helpful step towards becoming self-directed readers. English Language Learners can benefit from additional time to focus on the language of the questions and to reflect on the behavior of self-directing their reading progress.

Give a student a question to answer and she will learn the passage she has just read. Teach her how to ask questions and she will learn how to learn for the rest of her life.

SOURCES: