

Contributions of Generic and Subject-Specific Perspectives on Teaching

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Donna Alvermann
University of Georgia

Instructional methods aimed at teaching reading in discipline/content materials are distinct from those found in beginning reading instruction. In fact, textbook authors, curriculum planners, college professors, and any number of other interested parties build entire careers around this distinction. An oft-repeated reason for the difference is that students learn to read before they read to learn. However, this is an outdated notion. Separating the act of reading from one of its functions – reading to learn *something* – makes no sense. Developmentally, beginning readers are different from skilled readers, but the difference lies more with the content or subject matter materials the two read than with their purpose for reading.

In this paper, I focus on the reading methods and activities that teachers and students use at the intermediate, middle, and high school level to foster learning in discipline/content materials. In synthesizing what the research and wisdom of practice suggest about these methods and activities, I have divided the paper into two parts. In the first part, I trace the historical development of content area reading (Alvermann & Hruby, 2001). This is an important first step because reading in content materials is heavily discipline-based, and the methods and activities associated with teaching reading in such materials are considerably different from those associated with beginning reading instruction. In the second part of the paper, I connect current research and practice in content area reading to Brophy's (2001) principles of good teaching and draw implications for classroom instruction. Finally, I offer some concluding thoughts on what we know (and don't know) about reading in discipline/content materials.

Principles of Good Teaching in Discipline/Content Materials

Four methods are common to most, if not all, that goes on in the name of reading in discipline/content materials. These methods include teaching students text comprehension strategies, preteaching content area vocabulary, using text-based discussions to engage students in reflecting on what they have read, and integrating literacy instruction across the curriculum – a method, interestingly enough, that is grounded more in the wisdom of practice than in the research literature per se.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Based on the research and wisdom of practice presented in this paper on reading discipline/content materials, there is considerable support for a number of Brophy's

(2001) principles of good teaching. As well, the National Reading Panel (2000) has validated a number of instructional strategies for teaching students to comprehend their assigned content area materials, including comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, using graphic and semantic organizers, answering and generating questions, using story structure, summarizing, and preteaching vocabulary. What we do not know, however, is how these strategies play out when used with students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Although up-to-date reviews of the literature exist on second language reading (Bernhardt, 2000; Garcia, 2000), they provide only meager information on how to teach the upper-grade or adolescent reader. Such information is completely missing in the report of the National Reading Panel (2000). As a result, one is left to wonder about the instructional implications for teaching reading to an ever-increasing number of English language learners in U.S. schools.

A further limitation of the National Reading Panel's (2000) report is its restricted view of the reading process. For example, six of the seven categories of text comprehension instruction that the Panel viewed as being backed by valid research represent methods teachers would use if they believe reading comprehension instruction consists of teaching strategies that enable individual students to work by themselves in extracting information from printed texts. As pointed out elsewhere (Alvermann, 2001; Wade & Moje, 2000) this rather narrow view of the reading comprehension process risks disenfranchising large groups of students for whom print texts are not the primary means through which they learn

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