

# Content Area Reading

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## Abstract

This paper is going to go over key points about content area reading. Some key points include how and when did this start, an explanation about content area reading, why and how teachers use this, a detailed description of the different subjects that deal with content area reading, and how students interact with each subject and the stages they read in-prereading, reading, responding, exploring, and applying as well as before, during, and after reading. My voice will also be heard when I discuss why this is beneficial to teachers and students. Overall, there are very important points about content area reading and what impact it has on students.

What is content area reading about? It is a very important tool that teachers should learn and help to teach to their students. As children make their way through elementary school, they transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Although content area reading is about nonfiction and for upper elementary students throughout high school, this is a tool that children should learn at a young age. Something important to remember is that students learn from previous teachings, and content area reading follows them throughout their education career. Content area reading involves subjects such as math, science, and literature, and focuses on factual and important information. This helps the students learn about the world around them and how to read true stories. This paper will include discussions about why content area reading is important to students, teachers, parents and the community. There will also be several other points regarding how content area reading started, what students do before, during, and after reading, and what happens when students cannot read/do not understand how to use content area reading.

When did content area reading begin? I, myself, was wondering the same question. The concept of content area reading was first seen around in the 1800s. But, in 1925, William Gray found a relationship between reading and learning subjects, and went with that (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik p.2). They also noted that it is essential to read in each of the subject areas, including history, geography, arithmetic, science and literature. While reading in each of these content areas, the students have a better understanding of what they just read, and it enhances their ability to read independently and intelligently throughout their education career (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik p.2). When you are a teacher, you need to make sure and keep your students up to date and tell them you are there when they need help. Not all students will know how to read

or write, but through good teaching, they can be on their way to form new habits and skills involved in reading. Some statistics from Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik provide interesting information about earlier times:

“In 1900, approximately 15.5 million students attended public schools, and only 0.5 million attended high school. Then, by 1992, there were 47.9 million students attending K-12 schools, and 27% were enrolled in grades 9-12” (p. 3).

With this being said, it was apparent that in the 1900s there was some sort of reading instruction, but only for upper education. It did not get down to the elementary level for another 60 years, when teachers started to use basic reading instruction which helped out younger students as well as the same for high school. Involving these dates and the progression over content area reading, there have been three major paradigms: the reading and study skills paradigm, the cognition and learning paradigm, and the social constructivist paradigm (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik p. 4). With saying this, here is a brief description from each of these three paradigms. The first one is the reading and study skills model. This was seen during the 1900s through the 1960s. The two types of reading that were focused on were identification and effects of reading and study skills. There are also two different approaches to teach this, which include direct and functional approach (p. 5-7). The second one is cognition and learning. This was seen during the 1970s through the 1980s. This area increases multidisciplinary reading and also has to deal with strategic learning (p. 8). The last one is the social constructivist. This was seen during the 1990s. This is based on experience in and out of a classroom and they learn something new everyday. It also has to deal with talking and reading and reading and writing (p. 9-10). Within all of these concepts, literature breaks through and is involved

in each and every one of these aspects. The definition has changed throughout the years and involved more ideas than ever, including functional, informative, cultural, progressive, critical, adolescent, informational, technological, media, musical, literacy, environmental, and emotional. More information about content area reading will be explained with some key points about why it is important.

Content area reading helps students read in certain content areas, including history, geography, arithmetic, science and literature. All of these are considered the main topics when students read, typically starting after 4<sup>th</sup> grade and on. The ten principles for content reading instruction include (Richardson, Morgan, Fleener p. 7-13)

- 1) Reading is influenced by the reader's personal store of experience and knowledge.
  - a. People interpret things differently even though they are the same experiences
- 2) The communicative arts foster thinking and learning the content subjects.
  - a. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- 3) Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is more than the traditional communicative arts.
  - a. Electronics and illustrations.
- 4) Reading should be a rewarding experience.
  - a. Pleasurable feelings while reading equal successful reading.
- 5) The practice of critical reading enables better thinking and learning to occur.
  - a. Practice makes perfect-reading is a thinking-related process.
- 6) Meaningful reading should start early and continue throughout life.
  - a. Early learning promotes lifelong learners.

- 7) Teachers need to refrain from assumptive teaching.
  - a. Not every student will know how to read/have materials to help them.
- 8) All students, no matter at what level of literacy or learning challenges, deserve instruction in content subjects that enables them to learn.
  - a. Students become more strategic and proficient learners.
- 9) Teaching should use the literacy tools that enable students to learn content material strategically.
  - a. Teachers need to use more than one tool and be up to date on new things.
- 10) Content reading instruction enables students to become autonomous learners.
  - a. To be independent in their learning habits.

When students and teachers look at a book, the teacher usually explains the concepts about the book to get the students more acquainted. Not only are these texts nonfiction, but they are structured and some of them rely on cause/effect, compare-contrast, or sequencing, which the students learn through reading (EDC). For students, there is a before, during, and after reading that helps them break down what they just read. Before reading, the students relate to knowledge previously learned and from outside sources and also get a feel for the questions they want to ask (EDC). During reading, they begin to look at difficult words and use context clues in order to better understand the reading (EDC). And after reading, the students reflect on the reading and think of different situations and ideas (EDC). These steps help students get a better understanding of the reading and help them actually get more from it. Another thing that is important is the two different instructional approaches that help students learn to use different study

skills, which are a direct approach, which is when the reading and study skills are separate from the content classroom, and the functional approach, which is when the teaching of reading is within the context of content learning (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik p. 6). In an article titled *Supporting Social Studies Reading Comprehension with an Electronic Pop-up Dictionary*, the subject of social studies and their textbooks "...have long been recognized as hard to read because of high reading levels, long sentences, technical vocabulary, too much content, and the use of primary source material ((Johnson, 1977) Fry & Gosky p. 128). To help students with comprehension, you can use several strategies, like the internet to gain more knowledge about the subject or visual aids, or you can help students by using these six steps: establish a purpose for reading, make connections to prior knowledge, use graphic organizers during reading to make sense of complicated text arrangements, use post-reading questions as a way to further comprehension and synthesize connections between texts (Fry & Gosky p. 128). But what happens when a student cannot read? What happens if he/she does not understand how to use these steps while reading?

To answer the questions above, we must first look at if a student cannot read. As Rebecca Derenge said in her PowerPoint, "Students who struggle with reading KNOW they struggle with reading" (p. 5). With this being said, teachers have to try and get around this fact to help students learn that reading is important and can be fun. Another fact that Derenge gave in her PowerPoint was Marzano's 9 Categories of Instructional Strategies That Affect Student Achievement (p. 8): Identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting

objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses and questions, cues, and advance organizers. All of these have a factor in why it is sometimes hard for students to learn how to read correctly. To get around these factors, the teacher should watch and monitor the students' progress. After observing some classrooms, I have noticed that when a student gets called on and is asked to read a passage, they are more than willing to. But, you also have the students who are embarrassed and seem distant- you have to work with these students and understand where they are coming from. Maybe their parents do not have books at home, or maybe the factor is a lack of motivation. When looking at reading problems, there are three different ways that you can point out if a student is having trouble. One way to tell is their lack of cognitive abilities, which include comprehension, vocabulary, word recognition, fluency, automaticity (Derenge p.10). The second way is the students have a negative attitude towards reading. He/She does not read in class and outside of class and does not make an effort. They might think that reading is "stupid" or they do not need it in the future. The last thing is that the student does not know how to read different kinds of texts (Derenge p.10). For example, they read science books like they would read a history book, which makes it harder for them to understand. At the end of this paper is a graph that helps you see some factors that affect student performance on the reading task (Derenge 13). A famous quote by Thomas Armstrong helps one understand that no two people are alike and people learn differently:

"We need to discover how a student's unique brain is wired for reading and writing and then use a range of approaches that matches his or her "literacy style." (Derenge p.11).



Motivation is also something you need to look at, and this helps students become more interested in reading. Turner and Paris (1995) explain "...how the context for literacy includes student choice, challenge, personal connection, collaboration, the construction of meaning, and specific consequences" (Richardson, Morgan & Fleener p. 442). Choice allows them to pick what they are interested in, challenge keeps them away from the B word (boring), personal connection makes them feel they are a part of the class, and collaboration makes them more curious and confident which helps show emotion. So what strategies can we give our readers to help them figure out how to learn to love to read and read correctly? There are several ways and connections that will help you along the way.

According to Derenge, you can use strategies and connections while reading. First off, the stages of reading include pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading (a stated explanation in this paper above are what a reader must do in each of these three stages). For each of these stages, there is a certain number of time spent to get a better understanding of reading, and the attached graph at the end of this paper will prove its point (Derenge p. 16). After you learn how to read in those three stages, there are two strategies that can help you. One is when you get to new words-what do you do if you do not understand them? Would you skip it and move on? This is a problem with readers because then they are not fluent and do not understand what they are reading. Some tips to help readers are to try and create mental images; they use clues to understand words, use sources (dictionary, etc.) identify with examples of the word and then non-examples, and think about the characteristics of the word (p. 17-18). Another strategy is called fix-up strategies-this is when a reader "shuts down" or does not want to read anymore due to

a misunderstanding/level of difficulty and they want to give up. But, they can use certain strategies, like visual imagery or rereading, and fix up or resolve the difficulty they had beforehand (Richardson, Morgan, Fleener p. 422). Some connections readers can make include connecting to new knowledge to make meaning and then connecting new knowledge to existing knowledge to make personal meaning (Derenge p. 23-26).

Condensing the text into main ideas also helps students. For some students, this is the best way for them to understand what they read and what they get in return. The six rules include: deleting unnecessary details to get the major facts, deleting redundant information and group them into categories, using blanket terms by replacing lists with familiar terms, selecting topic sentences and summarizing paragraphs to identify topic sentences, writing a first draft of a summary to make general topic sentences, and revising the summary to make it more readable (Richardson, Morgan & Fleener p. 381-382). After looking more into what Richardson, Morgan & Fleener had to say, they listed five steps to solve problems and making decisions while dealing with critical literacy, which include: gathering ideas and information while brainstorming, defining the problem and clarify, forming tentative conclusions while suggesting possible solutions, testing conclusions to see if they found the best way to solve the problem, and making decisions while giving reasons to their choice (p. 143)

Now to look at this on a personal level: how do I feel about content area reading? As a future teacher, how am I going to incorporate this into my classroom and teach it? These are several questions that I asked myself while researching this topic. My feelings towards content area reading are very strong, and I believe that everyone should choose to teach their students if they have difficulty. Not only does this help readers break down

the text into parts and make them understand it and read fluently, but it helps them read between the lines and learn how to read correctly for each subject area. Reading in history class is way different than reading in math class, and it requires different styles of teaching for the student to understand. After looking at several PowerPoint's and reading several books and journals, I understand how important content area reading is for teachers and how it impacts students' reading capability and understanding.

Content area reading is a very important tool that teachers should learn and help to teach to their students. Some students cannot read, or others do not want anything to deal with the thought of reading. It is the duty of teachers, parents, and the community to turn this around-to turn reading into an adventure for young children and to expand their horizons. If young students did not learn to read, or if no one taught them how to read, where would they go in their life? What would their future look like? Not too bright, I would say. It is up to us to brighten their future and to help students learn that reading is not a chore, and it can be fun and enlightening no matter what. As Maya Angelou said, "When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young" (Thylazine Foundation).

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