Chapter 50

Reading and Writing Strategies:
Tools for Active Engagement in the College Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In the field of education, students are not only expected to come to college with the reading and writing skills needed to successfully complete their program of study but also to enter the profession upon graduation with the ability to teach the next generation these skills. At the authors' institution of higher education, as with other higher education institutions, the reading and writing skills of incoming freshmen is a concern across the campus. To address this concern, two education faculty members created a reading and writing program. The program would prepare incoming freshmen with skills and strategies they could use to be successful in their college courses, as well as support student transition and retention. The pilot study created will address a concern raised in the literature regarding the under-explored reading research at the college level. To this end, this chapter shares the process involved in teaching the program and the experiences of the first cohort of students enrolled in the program.

INTRODUCTION

At our institute of higher education as with other higher education institutions, the reading and writing skills of incoming freshmen is a concern across the campus (Reeves, 2010). To address this concern in our department, we created a program that would prepare incoming freshmen with the reading and writing skills/strategies they could use to be successful in their college courses. More specifically, we designed a two-semester program consisting of two courses, one focusing mainly on reading strategies and the other focusing on the writing process. In addition to teaching college readiness skills, the program was also designed to create a support system, both peer and faculty, to address student retention

(Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; NSSE, 2011). While many colleges offer a writing course, this paper will address the need for colleges to acknowledge the need for a reading component to be added to the freshmen experience to better prepare them for the reading and writing expectations in their college courses. The pilot study created will address a concern raised in the literature and in a recent study by McGonnell, Parrila, and Deacon (2007) on how reading research focused on college and university students has been relatively underexplored.

This chapter will first review the literature on college readiness skills, writing, and learning strategies as well as on reading and the connection between reading and writing. Secondly, we briefly discuss the program, the reading strategies they used in the class, and the themes that emerged from student work. Finally, we explore the implications in the fields of higher education and reading instruction as part of college readiness skills.

COLLEGE READINESS

In higher education institutions across the country, the academic readiness of incoming classes of college students has become a serious cause for concern for their teachers (Reeves, 2010). There are significant numbers of students entering college, in recent years, without the solid foundation in reading and writing skills needed to meet the demands of the college classroom (Reeves, 2010).

In the field of education, students are expected to come to college with the reading and writing skills needed to successfully complete their program of study, but also, to enter the profession upon graduation with the ability to teach the next generation these skills. Frequently, those students who are identified for remediation typically receive tutoring at an institution's writing center—very few, if any, receive additional support with reading at the college level (Kirby, 2007). Research has shown that there is often a notable correlation between writing and reading that is typically under-addressed at the post-secondary level (Rachal, Daigle, and Rachal, 2007).

Writing

At the college or university level, students' weaknesses in the area of writing are more readily detected, given the vast number of assignments that require written responses on the part of the students. However, if students are not given adequate feedback, they will continue to make the same writing errors throughout their college education (Gambell, 1984). It is not surprising that poor writers generally receive poor grades within and across the courses they enroll. Today, many college instructors believe that referring their struggling students to the campus's writing center is often the only available option, at the college level, to help students with improving their writing skills. Professors may overlook or accept poor writing skills because of the time it takes to address them, or because of a lack of training in writing instruction, and most often because they have a considerable amount of content to cover in a particular course that they believe prohibits addressing issues with writing (Boice, 1990; Goddard, 2002).

Fallahi et al., (2006) study supports the teaching of writing skills in content courses to improve students' writing and suggest that it is worth the time the professor would spend in class in order to positively impact student achievement. The researchers examined the effects writing instruction delivered in the class via practice time, peer review, and feedback had on improving undergraduate students writing skills. They discovered that over the course of the semester students showed a significant improvement in four

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