

Chapter 10: Reading in the Content Areas

Teachers must be aware that basal reading instruction alone is not likely to prepare children thoroughly to read in the content areas. Students need to learn reading skills that are appropriate to specific subject areas, as well as general techniques that are helpful in reading expository text. Content texts present more reading difficulties than do basal reader materials. They have a greater density of ideas presented, and they lack the narrative style that is most familiar to the children. They may also contain many graphic aids that have to be interpreted.

Teachers need to be aware of the readability levels of the materials they give children to read, and they must adjust their expectations and reading assignments based on the students' reading levels in relation to the readability of available instructional materials. Cloze tests and informal reading inventories can be used to predict how well children can read particular texts. Teachers can also use readability formulas in conjunction with the children's reading test scores to estimate the appropriate materials for specific children. Although readability formulas have the drawback of being completely text based, they can help teachers assess the relative difficulty of material with reasonable accuracy. Computer programs can help teachers apply readability formulas.

Many techniques can be used to help children read content area materials more effectively. Among them are the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, the guided reading procedure, Press Conference, the language experience approach, feature analysis plus writing, keeping learning logs, webbing, creative mapping, structured overviews, every-pupil-response activities, readers' theater, use of study guides, use of manipulative materials, computer approaches, integrated approaches, thematic content units, and literature- based units across the curriculum.

Each content area presents special reading challenges, such as specialized vocabulary. Reading in literature involves comprehending many literary forms, including short stories, novels, plays, poetry, biographies, and autobiographies. English textbooks cover the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The techniques presented in these areas need to be practiced through authentic oral and written experiences. Social studies materials abound with graphic aids to be interpreted and require much application of critical reading skills. The newspaper is a good teaching aid for the social studies area. Mathematics has a special symbol system to be learned, but perhaps the greatest difficulty in this content area is the reading of story problems. Children need to learn a procedure for approaching the reading of such problems. Science and health materials contain many graphic aids. They also often include instructions for performing experiments, which must be read carefully to ensure accurate results.

Use of literature selections to work with content area concepts is effective in every content area. In addition, including real-life activities and connections to the students' backgrounds of experiences enhances learning.