Impacts of a Critical Reading Unit in the Early Weeks of a Developmental Writing Class

NADE / ATLANTA 2019

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BACKGROUND

- At the University of Wisconsin-Superior, two full-time (non tenured) academic teaching staff teach all sections of our developmental writing course on campus

- UWS has no stand-alone reading courses to supplement, so any reading instruction students will receive as freshmen is likely to occur in this course or in IDS 095, a Collegiate Studies Course

BACKGROUND (Slide 2)

- Our courses are accelerated co-requisites, with a WRIT 099 lab paired with students' credit-bearing Introduction to Academic Writing course

- The 099 lab, of course, is the most appropriate place to address literacy needs

Fall 2018 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Project

I administered <u>three tools</u> to my students at the beginning of the semester and once again shortly after midterm:

1. A **selection of multiple-choice reading comprehension questions drawn from Accuplacer** sample exams.

2. A **selection of text** (chosen by me) with minimal instructions for students **to read and annotate** according to their current understanding of the task.

3. A **multiple-choice and short-answer survey of self-reported habits and confidence** (or lack thereof) in students' reading strategies.

ACTIVE READING UNIT

- **Within the first few weeks of class, I introduced the idea of active reading**
  - **Compare to being "passive" while watching a sport being played vs. being "active" while playing it**
  - **Discuss the parts of the brain that "fire" when we annotate a text vs. just passively read it**
  - **Discuss the increase in comprehension and retention of material**
  - **Discuss the ease of review when student returns to the text next time around**

ACTIVE READING UNIT (slide 2)

- ▶ **I also introduced basic active reading strategies**
  - ▶ **KWL+ (k**now, **w**ant to learn, **l**earned, new/other questions)
  - ▶ **SQ4R (s**urvey, **q**uestion, **r**ead, **r**ecite/**r**espond/w**r**ite, **r**ecord/**r**eview
  - ▶ **Other common strategies:**
    - ▶ **Keeping a double-entry journal**
    - ▶ **Chunking**
    - ▶ **Using graphic organizers**
    - ▶ **Previewing a text**

ACTIVE READING UNIT (slide 3)

- **Other strategies we practiced:**
  - **Writing nutshell summaries**
  - **Flagging unfamiliar vocabulary and defining on the spot (also using context clues)**
  - **Preparing a key/legend**
    - All of this gives students the understanding of *annotating with a purpose* and gives them a toolbox; they also need to learn which tools to learn for which "jobs"/tasks

ACTIVE READING UNIT (slide 4)

- **Other strategies we regularly work on in the Introduction to Academic Writing course (with a focus on *academic argument*):**
  - Reading with and against the grain
  - Marking passages/words that represent use of the rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos)
 - Marking direct quotes and references to outside research (overlap with use of logos)

END-OF-SEMESTER FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

- At the end of the semester, I asked my students for feedback on the following four questions:

1. Do you believe you are a better/stronger reader now that you've taken this class? Why or why not?

2. What active reading techniques did we learn about/use in this class that seem to work well for you? Why are they helpful?

3. What active reading techniques did we learn about/use in this class that aren't particularly effective for you? Again, why did you not find them helpful?

4. Do you feel you are more confident in approaching college-level reading tasks with the skills and techniques gained in this class or not? YES ___ NO ___ Please explain.

SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF THE CONFIDENCE AND HABITS SURVEY

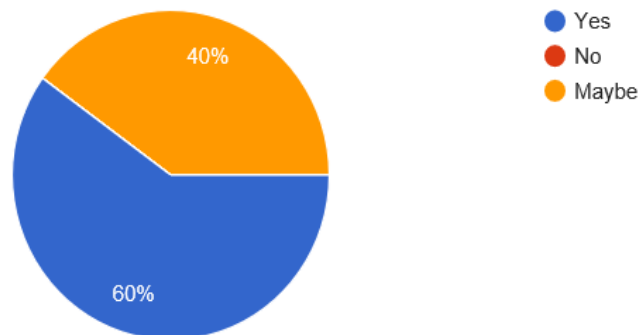9. Do you think your current reading strategies are overall effective?

15 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

60%
33.3%

9. Do you think your current reading strategies are overall effective?

15 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

40%
60%
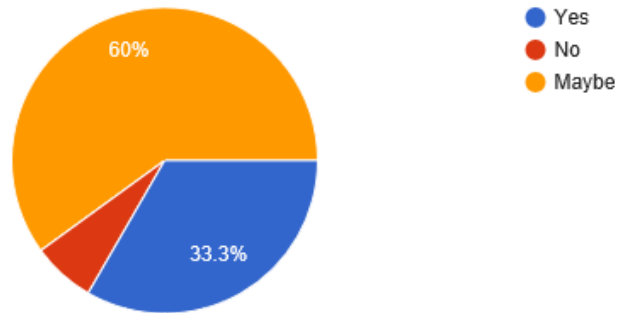
PRETEST RESULTS:
YES: 33.3%
MAYBE: 60%
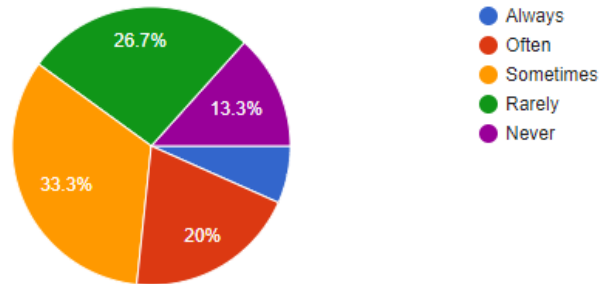**NO: 6.7%**

POSTTEST RESULTS:
YES: 60%
MAYBE: 40%
NO: 0%

SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF THE CONFIDENCE AND HABITS SURVEY (Slide 2)

4. How often do you highlight or mark up text while you're reading for an academic purpose?

15 responses

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

26.7% / 13.3% / 33.3% / 20%

4. How often do you highlight or mark up text while you're reading for an academic purpose?

15 responses

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

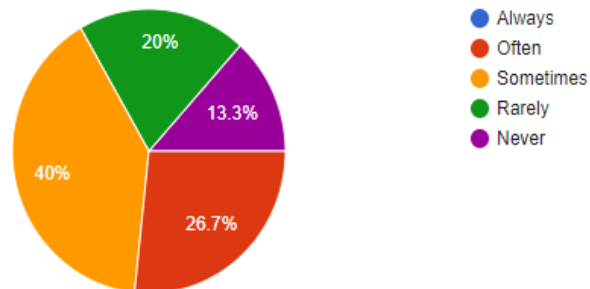20% / 13.3% / 40% / 26.7%

PRETEST RESULTS:

Always: 6.7%
Often: 20%
Sometimes: 33.3%
Rarely: 26.7%
Never: 13.3%

POSTTEST RESULTS:

Always: 0%
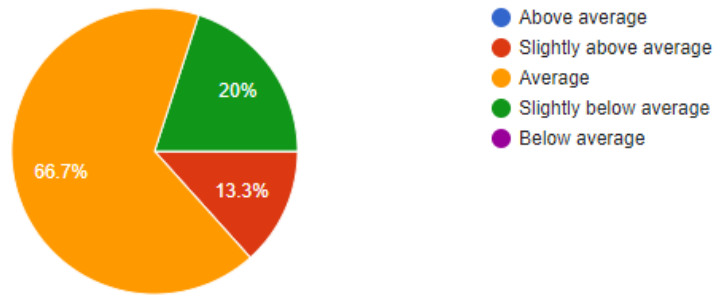**Often: 26.7%**
Sometimes: 40%
Rarely: 20%
Never: 13.3%

SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF THE CONFIDENCE AND HABITS SURVEY (Slide 3)

8. How would you rate your ability to summarize a text (condense a reading into a few sentences while using your own words)?
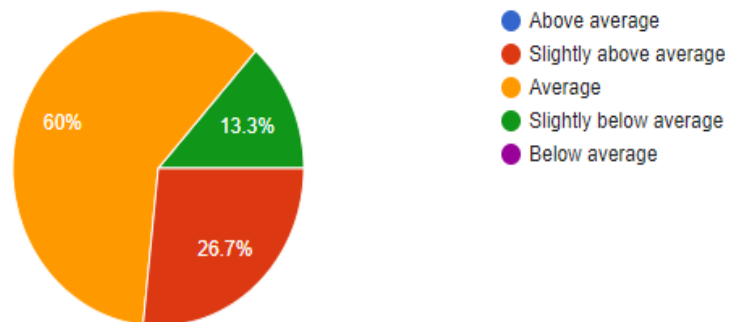
15 responses

PRETEST RESULTS:

Slightly above average: 13.3 %
Average: 66.7 %
Slightly below average: 20 %

8. How would you rate your ability to summarize a text (condense a reading into a few sentences while using your own words)?
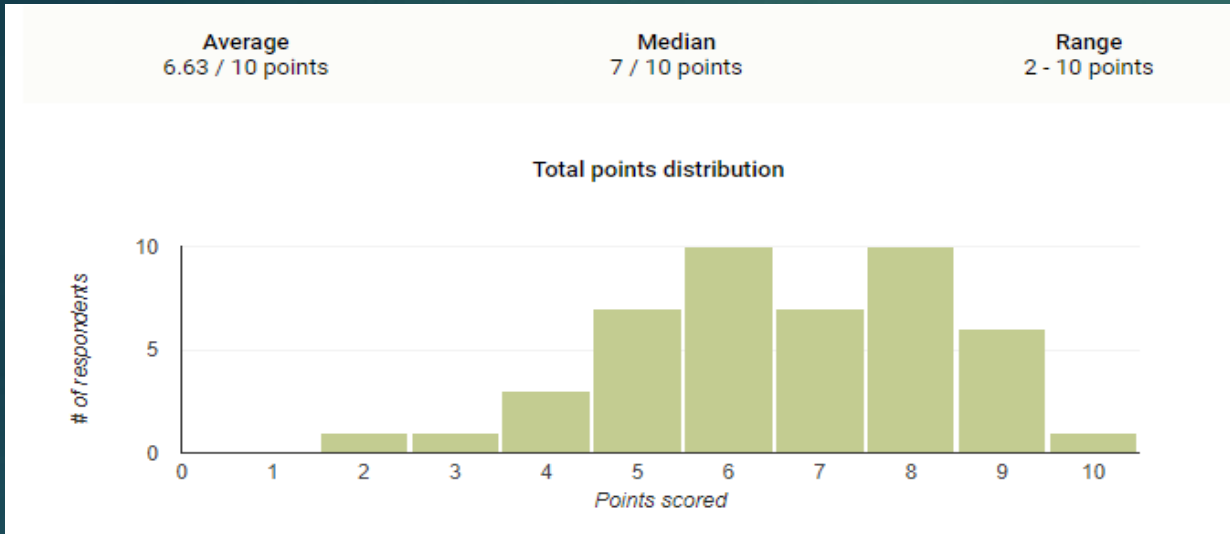
15 responses

POSTTEST RESULTS:

Slightly above average: 26.7%
Average: 60 %
Slightly below average: 13.3 %

ACCUPLACER RESULTS

PRETEST AVERAGE: **6.63** **POINTS CORRECT OUT OF TEN POSSIBLE**

N = 46
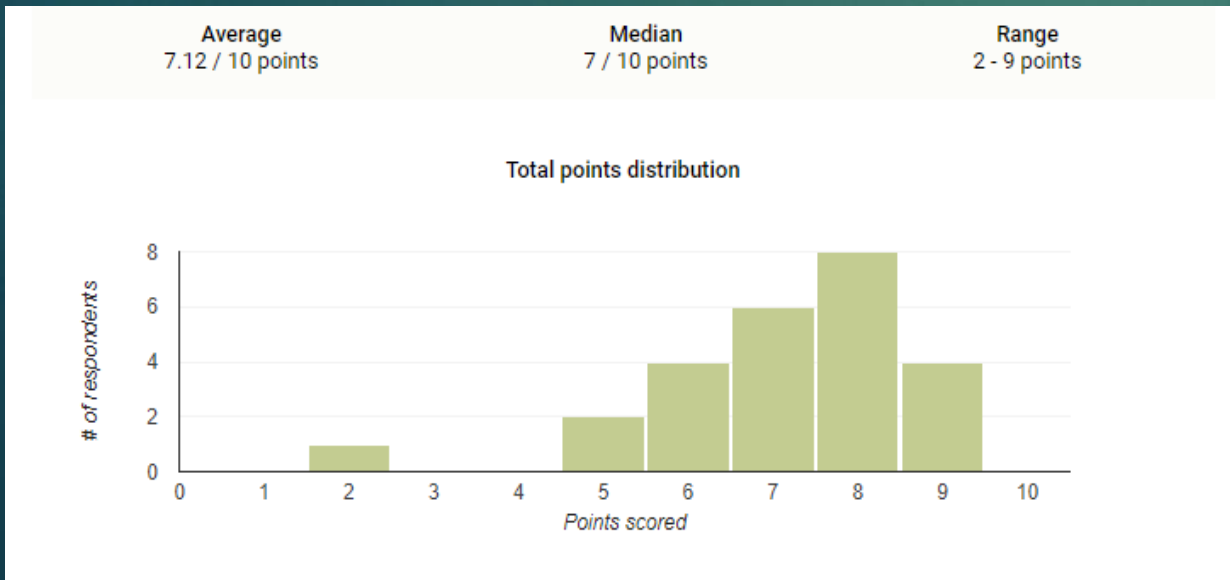
POSTTEST AVERAGE: **7.12** **POINTS CORRECT OUT OF TEN POSSIBLE**

N = 25

CHALLENGES WITH ACCUPLACER RESULTS

- ▶ SAMPLE SIZE CHANGED FROM BEGINNING OF SEMESTER TO END
(N = 46 VS. N = 25)

- ▶ It was encouraging that the total number of answers correct increased by .49%, but due to the change in sample size, no statistically significant conclusions can be made

CHALLENGES WITH THE STUDY REFLECT CHALLENGES WITH THIS POPULATION OF STUDENTS

- Endemic challenges with freshmen who place into developmental courses
  - Attendance
  - Study skills/habits
  - Follow-through
  - Commitment to low-stakes work or assignments that don't bear weight

CONCLUSIONS

▶ The following increases from the beginning to the end of the semester were reported by the 15 students who took the pretest and the posttest as well as consented to participate:

- **13.4%** increase in understanding of what it means to be an active reader.

- **26.7%** increase in students' beliefs that their reading strategies are overall effective.

- **13.4%** increase in students who *sometimes* or *often* highlight or mark up texts.

- **6.7 %** increase in students' ratings of their ability to summarize a text.

CONCLUSIONS (slide 2)

▶ **In an end-of-the-semester reflection, students were asked the following questions**

"Do you believe you are a better/stronger reader now that you've taken this class?"
-20 of 22 students replied "yes"

"Do you feel more confident approaching college-level reading tasks with the skills and techniques gained in this class or not?"

-18 out of 22 answered "yes"
-5 out of 22 answered "somewhat"
-0 out of 22 answered "no"

STUDENT COMMENTS

- "I have new strategies I can use when approaching a reading task."
- "This class helped me get through my history class."
- "I'm not afraid to read hard materials now."
- "I can handle larger more complicated texts now."
- "I feel like my reading comprehension has improved incredibly."

STUDENT COMMENTS (slide 2)

▶ "It is important to not just read the text but also to mark it up in order to retain the information."

▶ "[I've learned to] react to text with purpose. Not just highlighting because writing will help you to remember more. I hope to start questioning text and pulling out nutshell summaries in order to be more engaged."

▶ "I hope to adopt the ability to really just analyze and question whatever data that comes my way as I feel like that it [sic.] will really help me be engaged in everything."

▶ "I hope to be a better annotator and critical thinker."

▶ "I hope to start leaving notes and side comments to make it easier to study and look back at without having the reread all the time."

STUDENT ANNOTATIONS

- **Comparing student annotations from the beginning of the semester to the end showed increasing sophistication and intentionality in their annotation methods including the following:**
  - **The use of a key/legend**
  - **The use of multiple, rather than singular, colors for highlighting sections *for different purposes* rather than just the idea that the section was important in some way**
  - **Reference to the rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), which shows they are joining the academic discourse community**
  - **The use of nutshell summaries**

STUDENT #1 BEGINNING-OF-THE-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS

Student's name: _

Beginning

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following excerpt from an article titled "Screen Addiction Is Taking a Toll on Children" written by Jane E. Brody for *The New York Times* in July of 2015. *Annotate (mark up) the text in any way that you believe would be helpful if you had to understand and retain this information for an exam or essay.*

While Internet addiction is not yet considered a clinical diagnosis here [in the US], there's no question that American youths are plugged in and tuned out of "live" action for many more hours of the day than experts consider healthy for normal development. And it starts early, often with preverbal toddlers handed their parents' cellphones and tablets to entertain themselves when they should be observing the world around them and interacting with their caregivers.

In its 2013 policy statement on "Children, Adolescents, and the Media," the American Academy of Pediatrics cited these shocking statistics from a Kaiser Family Foundation study in 2010: "The average 8- to 10-year-old spends nearly eight hours a day with a variety of different media, and older children and teenagers spend more than 11 hours per day." Television, long a popular "babysitter," remains the dominant medium, but computers, tablets and cellphones are gradually taking over.

—fact

STUDENT #1 END-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS

underline = source ; box = words/phrases ; highlight = most important in the paragraph

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following excerpt from an article titled "Screen Addiction Is Taking a Toll on Children" written by Jane E. Brody for *The New York Times* in July of 2015. *(2nd)*

Annotate (mark up) the text in any way that you believe would be helpful if you had to understand and retain this information for an exam or essay.

While Internet addiction is not yet considered a clinical diagnosis here [in the US], there's no question that American youths are plugged in and tuned out of "live" action for many more hours of the day than experts consider healthy for normal development. And it starts early, often with preverbal toddlers handed their parents' cellphones and tablets to entertain themselves when they should be observing the world around them and interacting with their caregivers.

Young children today are addicted to the internet at such an early age that it affects the way they develop.

In its 2013 policy statement on "Children, Adolescents, and the Media," the American Academy of Pediatrics cited these shocking statistics from a Kaiser Family Foundation study in 2010: "The average 8- to 10-year-old spends nearly eight hours a day with a variety of different media, and older children and teenagers spend more than 11 hours per day." Television, long a popular "babysitter," remains the dominant medium, but computers, tablets and cellphones are gradually taking over.

STUDENT #2 BEGINNING-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS

Student's nar

Beginning

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following excerpt from an article titled "Screen Addiction Is Taking a Toll on Children" written by Jane E. Brody for *The New York Times* in July of 2015. *Annotate (mark up) the text in any way that you believe would be helpful if you had to understand and retain this information for an exam or essay.*

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STUDENT #2 END-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS

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End

Thesis

While Internet addiction is not yet considered a clinical diagnosis here [in the US], there's no question that American youths are plugged in and tuned out of "live" action for many more hours of the day than experts consider healthy for normal development. And it starts early, often with preverbal toddlers handed their parents' cellphones and tablets to entertain themselves when they should be observing the world around them and interacting with their caregivers.

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STUDENT #2 END-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS (CONT'D)

In preparing an honors thesis at the University of Rhode Island, Kristina E. Hatch asked children about their favorite video games. A fourth-grader cited "Call of Duty: Black Ops," because "there's zombies in it, and you get to kill them with guns and there's violence … I like blood and violence."

Statistic that is useful

Teenagers who spend a lot of time playing violent video games or watching violent shows on television have been found to be more aggressive and more likely to fight with their peers and argue with their teachers, according to a study in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence.

closing

Schoolwork can suffer when media time infringes on reading and studying. And the sedentary nature of most electronic involvement — along with televised ads for high-calorie fare — can foster the unhealthy weights already epidemic among the nation's youth.

STUDENT #3 BEGINNING-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS

Student's name: ___   9/12   Beginning

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read the following excerpt from an article titled "Screen Addiction Is Taking a Toll on Children" written by Jane E. Brody for *The New York Times* in July of 2015. *Annotate (mark up) the text in any way that you believe would be helpful if you had to understand and retain this information for an exam or essay.*

While Internet addiction is not yet considered a clinical diagnosis here [in the US], there's no question that American youths are plugged in and tuned out of "live" action for many more hours of the day than experts consider healthy for normal development. And it starts early, often with preverbal toddlers handed their parents' cellphones and tablets to entertain themselves when they should be observing the world around them and interacting with their caregivers.

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STUDENT #3 END-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS

12/04/18

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read ~~~~~~ ~~ m an article titled "Screen Addiction Is Taking a Toll on Children" written by Jane E. Brody for *The New York Times* in July of 2015. *Annotate (mark up) the text in any way that you believe would be helpful if you had to understand and retain this information for an exam or essay.*

End

While Internet addiction is not yet considered a clinical diagnosis here [in the US], there's no question that American youths are plugged in and tuned out of "live" action for many more hours of the day than experts consider healthy for normal development. And it starts early, often with preverbal toddlers handed their parents' cellphones and tablets to entertain themselves when they should be observing the world around them and interacting with their caregivers.

thesis

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STUDENT #3 END-OF-SEMESTER ANNOTATIONS CONT'D (USE OF KEY)

"there's zombies in it, and you get to kill them with guns and there's violence ... I like blood and violence."

Teenagers who spend a lot of time playing violent video games or watching violent shows on television have been found to be more aggressive and more likely to fight with their peers and argue with their teachers, according to a study in the Journal of Youth and Adolescence.

resources

Schoolwork can suffer when media time infringes on reading and studying. And the sedentary nature of most electronic involvement — along with televised ads for high-calorie fare — can foster the unhealthy weights already epidemic among the nation's youth.

unknown words

logos

ethos

pathos

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

▶ As expected, there is a significant need for explicit active reading instruction and modeling for students who test into developmental writing courses.

▶ This kind of instruction offers students tools to tackle reading in their college courses with more confidence.

▶ Students want these tools and recognize the impact they can have on their overall success in pursuit of their education.

INVESTIGATOR'S INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- It's best to <u>introduce</u> these strategies in the freshman year and then <u>reinforce</u> these practices via scaffolding throughout the four-year university curriculum

- Educators in various disciplines should reinforce these active reading strategies but with approaches unique to their discipline (this likely would require professional development)

- Students need to know best practices for active reading for core/general education courses but also in their field of study/individual disciplines, as these will *not* be the same

FURTHER INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Students also need to understand that they should use *different active reading strategies* for *different purposes* (e.g. if they're being asked to paraphrase, analyze, compare/contrast, etc.)**

- **As a result, this conversation needs to include instruction on task awareness; otherwise, students will fall into a routine of annotating the same way every time, perhaps wasting time, for example, reading with and against the grain when they've only been asked to paraphrase**

Students need and deserve instruction in these skills and strategies; their academic success—which requires retention and persistence with a growth mindset—depends on this.

THANK YOU, EVERYONE!

Any questions?

OPPORTUNITY FOR DISCUSSION/SHARING:

1. What unique approaches are you taking in your classrooms to students' literacy needs?

2. What active reading techniques are you using in your classroom that we haven't discussed today?

3. How are your institutions creatively and effectively responding to what may be referred to as a "literacy crisis" as the number of students who do not meet "college readiness" standards continues to increase?