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# Responding to the New Issues in Literacy Instruction

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Barbara Pace's article, 'Amazon, eBooks, and Teaching Texts' raises the significance of metacognition as a fundamental educational goal. As I read, I found myself stepping back, just as I have at various points in my career, and asking myself, 'How did I learn to do that when I read?' Like most, I cannot pinpoint a tangible, descriptive moment in my education. However, despite my inability to recall such a moment, the 'how' becomes a critical issue when I am teaching students reading strategies or teaching prospective teachers how to do so. Many current theorists and practitioners (Burke, 2000; Robb, 2000) of reading advocate instilling metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring as students think about what works and does not work when they read and correct their strategies. Although the development of such strategies takes time, teachers can instill such strategies in students by repeatedly modeling them and encouraging students as they track them through such means as journaling, conferencing, and observing. The dilemma with teaching metacognitive strategies to students resides in the modeling. One cannot help but wonder how teachers might approach this task when many are just beginning to reflect on such processes in themselves. How can we model and teach students something with which we still struggle?

Furthermore, how can we train both ourselves and our students to become more critical readers who possess an awareness of the material we subconsciously filter out? Pace refers to Rosenblatt's (1988) discussion of 'selective attention' in which learning hinges upon 'how we focus on the different elements of an environment in which we are immersed.' How can we become more aware of these elements that exist but that we do not see easily due to our personal sets of experiences? How can we teach students to understand their reading as a unique process?

The use of online bookstores and their many resources to select books has potential as an excellent metacognitive tool. A search for a class or group of texts as Pace described, complemented by the vast information available on these sites, requires readers to engage in several levels of problem solving, to slow down and take a moment to consider various books and question why they are considering some books over others. We, teachers and students, unknowingly use these strategies on a regular basis, yet fail to make these decision-making processes explicit. So many teachers of reading simply take their students to the library and say, 'Pick a book to read.' How? Why?

## Concerns of Technology in the Classroom

The concept of eBooks has many positive applications in a classroom environment, as Pace asserts, but, as with any technology, regardless of its simplicity or complexity, concerns accompany its introduction into the classroom. The plethora of quality reading material that eBooks provide for a classroom is not insignificant by any means, and the instructional implications become limitless. The eBooks and readers provide occasions to make the processes of reading visible to a classroom of students. The strategies that Pace suggested provide a new lens through which to engage reluctant readers and challenge the fluency of every reader. Nothing proves more exciting for students to genuinely connect and interact with a text, and there is nothing more rewarding for a teacher than to witness such an event. The use of eBooks raises many questions of equal access, which every teacher educator needs to address, including

- What about limitations of availability of computers?
- How can we deal with the reluctance of teachers to embrace technology?
- How can we become more creative in designing classroom arrangements to facilitate these literary activities?

## Changes Technology Brings to Reading

Even in a classroom in which every student is fortunate enough to have a computer available, is some elusive intangible quality of printed books lost to technology? I picture students in my own middle school language arts classroom passing around a few precious copies of the latest book, usually Harry Potter, that they are interested in and pointing out passages, laughing, and discussing it as they share it. Students cannot very well pass around a computer and interact in such a personal manner. They cannot curl up comfortably upon piles of old pillows and simply read. There is a certain quality that such actions bring to enhancing the reading process, to making it more 'real' in the sense that a book is something that students can take with them and read anywhere. It is hard to imagine such a quality accompanying a computer, even in this age of laptops; perhaps that is a new educational challenge?

The use of computers for reading raises additional, pedagogical questions:

- Do students experience a difference in their reading frustration level when reading from the computer?
- Do some students find reading from the computer easier whereas others find it more difficult?

While eBooks provide a more linear form of text than the hypertext that students encounter on the Internet, it is not identical to that of the printed page. For example, students cannot easily and quickly flip back and forth from page to page to reread and compare passages on the computer as they can with a printed text. Instead they have to scroll and hunt for passages with less of a side-by-side comparison.

The possibility that e-mail discussions among students raises is excellent. Who can find fault with incorporating reading and writing in the form of meaningful discussion? If such a program were implemented in a classroom, the issue of availability of computers and equal access rears its ugly head again. Many logistics would need to be worked out for this great exchange of words.

- Would students e-mail each other at school or from home?
- If from home, what about those who do not have computers or Internet access?
- What about issues of Internet safety?

## Moving Beyond Pace's Project

Although Pace employs these technology-based strategies and resources with prospective teachers, many of those future teachers will replicate such experiences for their own students in some manner. It is something that they will have experienced that is new, exciting, and comfortable. Pace utilizes a rich discussion in her class in which students share their experiences in reading such stories and 'look for similarities in the paths they have cut through the material.' Questions for valuable research include:

- How similar are the paths students discovered?
- Was there a distinct pattern that emerged or was it erratically individual?
- If a distinct pattern emerged, to what was it attributed?
- Were there distinct metacognitive steps?

The steps taken in this project to heighten teacher awareness of their own reading processes are fascinating and applicable in any literacy classroom. We need to witness classroom applications of such technology enhancements as learning tools and see how various classrooms answer some of the issues raised.

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