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RESPONSE :

AN INTERACTIVE STUDY TECHNIQUE

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In schools and colleges, learning is a shared responsibility. Students and teachers, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success, work toward the shared goal of increasing student knowledge and understanding. Within the traditional pattern--teachers teach; students study--student learning has been enhanced by teachers' recognition of the importance of teaching students to use effective study techniques.

SQ3R--Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (Robinson, 1961) continues to be the most widely used study strategy, and a useful discussion of methods for introducing this technique, together with a review of related research, has recently been provided by Stahl and Henk (1987). A wealth of other study strategies have been developed, including those which expand the SQ3R format (Edwards, 1972; Spache and Berg, 1966), simplify it (Smith and Elliot, 1979), or vary it to focus on specific content areas (Fay, 1965; Pauk, 1974).

Although an array of useful techniques are available to encourage effective studying, this is an aspect of the learning process in which teacher and students typically do not interact. The teacher's role is usually limited to providing instruction in study strategies, encouraging their use, and using the results of tests as feedback on the effectiveness of study.

Moving beyond "teachers teach; students study"

The traditional pattern--students study--which is maintained in all of these strategies is, of course, an essential component of the learning process. But student isolation during the study process may have negative effects. Even if students understand a study strategy, and devote energy to its use, they may fail to understand, or may

misunderstand, what they have read. Actively engaged students who realize they they do not understand the text will ask for clarification, but students who misunderstand what they have read will feel no need for explanation and their misunderstandings are likely to remain undetected.

The RESPONSE technique meets the need for a method to provide interaction between students and teacher as a component of the study process. The method may be used in conjunction with other study strategies, or it may stand alone. RESPONSE was originally devised to enhance the study process for college students, and the examples included here are taken from RESPONSEs written by graduate and undergraduate students in education courses.

The RESPONSE form

A RESPONSE form has a heading for name, date, and reading assignment. The remainder of the page is divided into three unequal sections: Important points (As you read, list essential information and state important ideas; cite page numbers.); Questions (As you read, note questions that occur to you. Cite page numbers of their source. Some questions will be ideas for discussion. For others, you will want an immediate answer; star* these.); New terms/concepts/vocabulary/names (List words, phrases, technical terms, names of people, basic ideas which are new to you. Cite page numbers. Star* items you would like to have defined or explained.) Directions for RESPONSE may be included at the top of the form. (Fill in the form as you read. It's for notes, questions, ideas; while it should be legible, it's not meant to be a neat, finished piece of writing. Limit yourself to a single sheet, front and back. Your RESPONSE will be returned to you, with comments, usually at the next session after you hand it in.)

***Important points**

The largest section of the RESPONSE form provides a place for students to list the ideas from their reading which they have identified as most significant. It is important that students be instructed to state ideas, rather than simply listing topic labels; for example, "Readability formulas: usually based on sentence length and number of unfamiliar words" is a useful statement, whereas "Read-

ability formulas" is not.

*Questions

RESPONSE is similar to many study strategies in encouraging students to generate questions, but here students are also expected to categorize their questions. Some will be questions which the student regards as interesting; these may be a form of musing about the text topics; e.g., "Why do so many teachers still use round robin reading?" "Do you think that new teachers tend to stick close to teaching manuals for the first couple of years, and as they get more comfortable with the material begin using other sources?" These questions often provide the basis for class discussions as well as a sharing of ideas between teacher and student.

Prompt answers to other questions, either written on the form or provided in class, help students when, for whatever reason, parts of an assigned reading seem intractably puzzling to them. These are two questions (phrased as comments) from students in an introductory reading course: "I didn't understand the chart on page 324 on scheduling activities. Is the teacher reading silently while the children are doing their activities?" "I'm still unsure what derivational suffixes are and what they are used for (p. 216)." The page numbers recorded with the questions allow the teacher to respond efficiently, without having to scan an entire section of text to find the question's origin.

*New terms

The smallest portion of the form provides a place for students simply to list terms, concepts, vocabulary and names which are new to them. Almost any book is likely to include vocabulary which is unfamiliar to some readers; texts typically include new concepts, and familiar words used in an unfamiliar way. Some students use the section to list the technical vocabulary which the author introduces, such as metacomprehension and automaticity. For other students, words whose use is not confined to professional texts, such as ambidextrous, vicarious, ensconced, commences, pertinent, ambiguous, rhetorical, will be new. Current research suggests that referring students to dictionaries to determine word meanings is often not fruitful

(Miller & Gildea, 1987) and teachers should take seriously the agreement that any starred items are to be explained.

Everyone asks questions

By requiring students to make decisions about how to categorize their study notes, and which new topics need further explanation, the RESPONSE technique focuses student attention during the study process. The three-category RESPONSE format serves an additional useful function: it emphasizes the fact that everyone studying a topic has something to learn. Many students, even at the college level, cling to the idea that a successful student is someone who already knows all there is to know. Good students, according to this view, have no questions and encounter no terms or concepts which are new. The RESPONSE technique helps students reject this counterproductive idea because notes must be made in each of the three categories. Moreover, when questions from RESPONSE are shared and discussed, students see that interesting, important questions can be raised about any significant topic.

What students know, and teachers don't

Just as common-sensical as "teachers teach; students study" is the expectation that teachers know more about the text than students do. Yet there is one way in which students can provide more information about a text than the teacher can; students can find out where the points of confusion are. Precisely because teachers has background knowledge and understanding of topics in the text they will not find a well-written text confusing. But even the best of texts contain hidden pitfalls, and RESPONSE teaches the teacher where they are.

This point is illustrated by RESPONSEs based on the text on teaching reading by Dolores Durkin (1983). Because of students' RESPONSE forms, I know Durkin's assertion that kindergartners should be taught "the meaning of word" is often misread as a direction to teach kindergarten children definitions of words. In their acceptance of the commonplace idea that it is important to teach word meanings, students miss Durkir's sophisticated message that it is necessary to help children to develop a concept of what a word is.

The importance of requiring students to include page numbers when noting important points comes home to an instructor who is confronted with the news from several students that Durkin asserts "avoiding written words is important"! Amazing as it seems, this statement does appear in the text, but in context it is perfectly sensible. Durkin is providing information about how to teach children to identify words which have the same beginning sound, and she notes that this activity must be oral, since children could identify similarities based on visual clues if the written words were shown.

As soon as they have been used for one course, my texts are annotated with notes from RESPONSEs, indicating points of agreement, disagreement, confusion and minor inaccuracies. One student group helps the next in this fashion.

Assigning RESPONSEs

RESPONSEs will be only one of several written assignments which students complete, and which teachers read and comment upon. It is necessary, therefore, to think through the assignment so that it does not burden either students or teacher. At the college level, there are advantages in requiring students to complete several RESPONSEs without specifying dates for submission. This makes it likely that some of the students will respond to each of the reading assignments. It is important to specify that individual students should submit RESPONSEs one at a time, and complete at least two before the final month of the course. Completion of extra RESPONSE forms may be made an option for students who find this method of study particularly productive, and may be used as an alternative for students who must miss a class session.

Another way to assign RESPONSEs is to divide a class into fourths and require members of each group to complete RESPONSE every fourth week, on a rotating basis. All students learn the technique, and reactions from heterogeneous student groups are likely to be typical of the total class. Alternatively, RESPONSEs to the same short reading assignments may be required periodically from all students in a class or group, and used as the basis for a discussion. If students bring completed RESPONSE forms to a group

meeting, listings of important points may be compared and discussed, questions may be shared and a group compilation of new terminology prepared. This method of using RESPONSES reduces the amount of teacher writing which is necessary, since the forms are not collected until after the group meeting, and students may annotate their own forms when their questions are answered during group discussion. Some written teacher comments, however, should always be provided before a RESPONSE is returned.

Preparation of a RESPONSE form as a class or group activity prior to its assignment as an independent activity is useful with younger students, and students whose experience with study techniques is limited. The RESPONSE strategy is particularly appropriate for modeling in this way because the goal is to produce a series of notes in three categories, rather than a finished piece of writing. At the college level, RESPONSE forms, based on a reading of the course syllabus and course assignments, may be completed and discussed at the first class session.

Commenting on RESPONSES

Clarifications, explanations, expansions, and supportive comments are all appropriate when teachers react to students' RESPONSE forms. This does not mean that nothing but praise is needed. "I disagree; we'll discuss" is a direct comment, as is "No; this is not what the text says" .or "not what the author intended" - followed by a clarification. If a RESPONSE is incomplete, not thoughtfully prepared, or too brief, it may, of course, be returned without credit. When this happens, the teacher should follow up to make sure that the student understands what is required and is, if necessary, helped to produce a satisfactory RESPONSE.

There is a temptation to respond briefly, e.g., "Splendid!", to a thorough, thoughtful RESPONSE containing only questions which are the result of student musing. It's better to comment as well as praise. Sharing some of your own ideas in response to the questions is reinforcing as well as informative for the dedicated student. Another temptation is to react to starred questions and terms on the RESPONSES of less skillful students by referring the students to the text. But the use of the RESPONSE tech-

nique implies a promise of helpful answers. The technique works best when the teacher is willing to take the time to provide requested information, either on the form itself, or in subsequent class instruction, or both.

RESPONSE is a shared activity

The RESPONSE technique differs from other study strategies in that students cannot use it alone. Teachers cannot simply give RESPONSE forms as an assignment, and do no more. As students study, they must take action which enables them to share their reactions to what they read with their teacher. The teacher must read thoughtfully, comment carefully, and return the RESPONSE forms without delay. The effort is productive for both student and teacher.

Most study strategies are named with an acronym which provides a mnemonic reminder of strategy steps. RE-SPONSE is not an acronym. The term was chosen because the activity is based on the student's response to a reading assignment, and the teacher's response to what the student has written. An additional reason for the choice of name was that response and responsibility are similar in derivation, and, in this conceptualization of the study process, related in meaning also. Spondere, in Latin, means to promise. Teacher and students are promising to work together, through structured messages going back and forth, when the RESPONSE technique is used.

The term can be used as an acronym, however, to provide a summary of directions. Here the underlined portion is directed to the students, the non-underlined are for the teacher, and the final capitalized sentence is for all.

Record your notes as you read.

Each part of the form must be completed.

Star the questions and terms you need explained.

Prompt return of student responses makes them most useful.

Offer explanations, clarifications, comments and praise.

Note comments for total class by annotating your text.

Save returned RESPONSE forms with your class notes.

EVERYONE - BOTH STUDENTS AND TEACHER - HAS
RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING.

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