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A noticeable shift has occurred in research on the improvement of reading instruction, a shift to a concern for what readers think they do as they read. Although Dewey's (1910) emphasis on reflective thinking identified the need for such a shift to thinking about thinking, it was Flavell's (1970) work involving the memory processes of young children that actually stimulated the current interest in metacognitive research.

According to Flavell (1976), metacognition is a term that refers to an awareness of and an ability to capitalize on one's own knowledge and thought processes as they relate to some specified task; thus, the extent to which one is considered a proficient learner depends on how successful one is in orchestrating the deployment of various strategies to achieve some predetermined goal. This definition applied to reading suggests that proficiency in using different strategies to comprehend written text may be related as much to an awareness of one's ability to cope with certain task demands as to one's general reading ability. Yet the tendency persists to equate a reader's **proficiency** in comprehending text with scores on standardized reading tests.

This practice is questionable given what we know about the relationship of student expectations to subsequent achievement. Smead and Chase (1981), for instance, found that even when they controlled for general academic ability, as measured by the **Cognitive Abilities Test**, eighth grade math students were able to predict reliably how well they would do on two year-end achievement measures. Similarly, in a study which controlled for reading achievement as measured by the **Iowa Tests of Basic Skills** (ITBS), Alvermann and Ratekin (1982) reported that seventh and eighth grade readers were remarkably accurate in predicting how much they would recall on an essay test.

The potential implications of these findings for classroom teachers prompted a closer look at the questionnaire data collected in the Alvermann and Ratekin study. Although we originally had been interested in only the average readers, who scored at stanines 4, 5, and 6, for the present investigation it seemed worthwhile to look at the below average (1, 2, 3) and above average (7, 8, 9) stanine groups as well. Specifically, how did these seventh and eighth graders who had been identified as below average, average, and above average readers on the ITBS rate themselves on reading proficiency? Second, what reasons did they give for their "average" self-ratings? Third, how is a good reader characterized? Fourth, did students who regarded themselves as "average" readers (and who scored at the average level on the standardized reading test) predict that they would use the same study strategies as students who perceived themselves as "average" readers but who **actually** scored either below or above average on the standardized test? Finally, and most importantly, what does all of this mean to the classroom teacher?

METHOD

An entire seventh and eighth grade population (N = 342) participated in this study. Students attended a public junior high school located in a small, industrial Midwestern city. The school drew students from all socioeconomic levels and had a minority population of 22.7 percent.

Students completed an open-ended, thirteen-item questionnaire during their regularly scheduled developmental reading classes. The first two questions merely sought general information about characteristics that distinguish skilled and less-skilled readers. Question 3 asked students to rate themselves as readers (good, average, or poor). Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 were modeled after those of Myers and Paris (1978) and served as transitions in helping students to think about person and task variables related particularly to school reading assignments. Questions 8, 9, 10, and 11 were considered core items. These items sought through hypothetical situations to tap students' predictions of what strategies they would use when reading and studying for a test. This method of using hypothetical learning situations was found to be a viable means for helping youngsters as young as sixth graders overcome difficulties in externalizing mental events (cf. Elliott, 1981). Finally, questions 12 and 13 dealt with oral versus silent reading preferences.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Independent of any knowledge of their latest ITBS scores, over 60 percent of the students (total N = 342) in each of the three stanine groups rated themselves as average readers. Interestingly, of the students who tested below average on the standarized reading test, only 21 percent actually believed that they were poor readers; in fact, nearly that many (18 percent) thought of themselves as good readers. These findings are somewhat consistent with those of Smead and Chase (1981). In their study of student expectations, 69 percent of the eighth grade math students indicated that they had high expectations for themselves, whereas 31 percent indicated low expectations.

Of even more interest are the reasons those 60 percent who rated themselves as being "average" readers gave for believing they were

just average. As indicated in Table 1, infrequent reading, varying interest, and liking to read took precedence over more mechanistic reasons such as decoding and rate. Varying interest ("sometimes I'm into reading, sometimes not") was the reason most above average readers gave for believing they were only "average." Over 18 percent of that same group attributed not reading very often as another reason for thinking of themselves as "average." Certainly the two reasons appear related, and taken together, account for over 42 percent of the responses of the above average group.

TABLE 1
Percent of Students from Three Stanine Groups Reporting Reasons for Beleving They Were "Average" Readers

	ITBS STANINE GROUPS		
Reasons	1,2,3 Below Average N=43	4,5,6 Average N=125	7,8,9 Above Average N=54
Not the best - not the worst	37.2	12.0	
Don't read very often	16.3	21.6	18.5
Sometimes I'm into reading, sometimes not	2.3	12.8	24.0
Like to read	11.6	13.6	9.2
Know many words -only mix up some	9.3	10.4	11.1
Can't read fast	4.6	12.0	5.5
Read often	4.6	1.0	1.8
Can read 500 words/minute	0	1.6	3.7
Don't read with expression	0	1.6	3.7
Can keep with any group	2.3	1.6	0

Table 2 presents the responses of the same self-perceived average readers to the question, "What makes someone a good reader?" In contrast to their own infrequent reading (the second most cited reason in Table 1 for believing they were just "average"), this group characterized the good reader as someone who reads often. In fact, no less than 22 percent and as high as 46 percent of them mentioned frequent reading in relation to the good reader. Also, they characterized the good reader as someone who understands and remembers what he/she reads. This last characteristic, interestingly enough, received no mention in Table 1, and while it is tempting to speculate why, the data simply do not lend themselves to such interpretation.

TABLE 2
Percent of Self-Perceived "Average" Readers from Three Stanine Groups Reporting Characteristics of a Good Reader

	ITBS STANINE GROUPS		
Characteristics	1,2,3 Below Average N=43	4,5,6 Average N=125	7,8,9 Above Average N=54
Reads Often	46.5	36.0	22.2
Understands/ Remembers	27.9	34.4	37.0
Likes to Read	11.6	19.2	25.9
Gets into Books	7.0	4.0	5.6
Reads with expression	7.0	6.4	9.2

Finally, students who regarded themselves as "average" readers (and who scored at the average level of the standaried reading test) differed considerably in reported study strategy use from students who perceived themselves as "average" but who actually scored either below or above average on the ITBS. An inspection of the data in Table 3 indicates that average readers, who also thought of themselves as "average," predicted that they would read slowly more often than below average readers but less often than average readers. Also, the average readers said, in answer to hypothetical read/study situations, that they would read for details and for main ideas more often than either of the other two stanine groups. Fewer average than below average readers said that they would reread or make pictures in their minds (image-making) as they read and studied.

Not surprisingly, the average readers had less difficulty than the below average readers (but more than the above average) in naming specific strategies that they would use. According to Table 3, only a little over 25 percent of the average readers mentioned such non-specific strategies as the following: "study longer and read harder," just read," "read it anyway I can to get good at it," and "get mad and pout."

TABLE 3
Percent Study Strategies by Self-Perceived "Average" Readers (Expressed in Percentages)

	ITBS STANINE GROUPS		
Specific Strategies	1,2,3 Below Average N=43	4,5,6 Average N=125	7,8,9 Above Average N=54
Reads Slowly	30.2	39.2	46.3
Details	7.0	16.8	13.0
Reread	11.6	10.4	14.8
Main Idea	4.7	5.6	3.7
Personally identify	0	1.4	3.7
Image-making	2.3	1.0	0
Non-specific Strategies	44.2	25.6	18.5

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Since classroom teachers deal continually with student expectations, the findings of this study may provide added understanding of why it is important to look beyond test scores for reasons related to pupil progress, or lack of progress as the case may be. Content area teachers in particular may find that the results describing students' metacognitive knowledge about available reading/studying strategies are suggestive of some instructional emphases. At the very least, these results should raise some questions.

Why, for example, only a small percentage of the students in each stanine group who thought that they were "average" readers mentioned reading for main ideas and supporting details is unclear. Perhaps students who failed to mention either of those two strategies had a more limited knowledge of the entire range of available strategies, or perhaps they had found from past experience that "reading slowly" and "rereading" were just as effective as higher level processing. Then, too, it may have been that they had difficulty articulating just what it is they do when they engage in a read/study type situation.

Whatever the reason, teachers who are interested in providing instruction in strategy use need to keep in mind that merely calling students' attention to the usefulness of particular strategies will not be sufficient. The reason being, according to Ann Brown (1980, p. 15) is that:

It is not sufficient to "have" (in the sense of be available in the knowledge base) knowledge of strategies, unless one can use them effectively in the learning process. Learners who are not aware of their own limitations, or strengths, or of their own strategic repertoire, can hardly be expected to apply appropriate strategies flexibility, and precisely in tune with task demands.

What this implies is a need for teachers to assess and then share informally their students' current flexibility in applying reading/studying strategies to actual classroom assignments. Also, since various tasks (e.g., a multiple-choice final versus the discussion of a chapter section) will require different strategies, teachers may find it helpful to show students how to modify a particular strategy so that it matches the demands of the task. The essential point is that students must be kept informed of what they already know or can do well, what it is they still need to know, and most importantly, how to go about learning it.

One final implication for teachers, based on the findings of this study, is related to how other students perceive good readers. If the fact that good readers are characterized as reading often and understanding and remembering what they read, the most profitable approach for teachers might be to make frequent textbook assignments and to make them simple enough so that low expectation readers develop a sense of accomplishment. Also, low expectation students will need specific instruction in how to read for understanding and retention. Instruction by itself, however, will stand very little chance of being successful in the sense of having a carryover effect to other learning unless students are made aware of the central role they play in determining when and where to apply specific strategies. This metacognitive knowledge should provide a basis for helping students see themselves as individuals with strengths (and limitations) in the learning process. Only then will they be able to alter their expectations in a positive direction.

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NOTE TO READERS:

Because of MRA's current financial condition, the Board of Directors decided to limit Volume 16 to two issues.