Experienced and Inexperienced Readers: Behaviors and Attitudes

Faced with the challenge of reading a text assigned in one of our classes, experienced readers will use a set of skills that inexperienced readers have yet to learn. Below is a brief, generalized description of the difference in approaches.

(Source: Joan Wong, Lecture, English 715, Jan. 2007)

Before reading a text, experienced readers will . . .

- Activate background knowledge (for example, consider what they know about the topic);
- Make sure they understand the task, set a purpose, and make predictions;
- Choose appropriate reading strategies.

Before reading, inexperienced readers will . . .

- Start reading without preparation;
- Start reading without knowing why or only when prompted;
- Read every single piece of text in the same way.

During reading, experienced readers will . . .

- Focus their attention and anticipate text content;
- Monitor their comprehension;
- Use “fix-up” strategies (strategies to help them engage actively with the text and comprehend it more fully);
- Use context to help their comprehension;
- Use their knowledge of the text’s structure and organization to help comprehension;
- Organize and integrate new information.

During reading, inexperienced readers will . . .

- Become easily distracted;
- Read to just “get it done”;
- Not realize that they aren’t understanding the text;
- Not know to use “fix-up” strategies;
- Not recognize key vocabulary;
- Not see organizational patterns in the text;
- Add on, rather than integrate, new information.

After reading, experienced readers will . . .

- Reflect on what they read;
• Feel successful as a result of their effort;
• Be able to summarize the main ideas;
• Know to seek additional information or confirmation from other sources.

After reading, inexperienced readers will . . .

• Stop reading and thinking about the text;
• Assume any success they feel is a result of luck;
• Fixate on the minor details;
• Not necessarily know to seek additional information or confirmation from other sources.

**Teaching Reading Skills**

To help inexperienced readers learn the skills they need to be more successful, the National Reading Panel (in *Teaching Children to Read*, Reports of the Subgroups, 2000) recommends that teachers help them engage in . . .

• Comprehension monitoring (metacognitive strategies);
• Cooperative learning (such as group work);
• Using graphic and semantic organizers (to understand text structure);
• Recognizing story structure;
• Question answering;
• Question generating;
• Summarizing.

Dr. Helen Gillotte-Tropp (English Department, SFSU) also adds that teachers should . . .

• Be transparent (always explain “why”);
• Provide time for reflection (think about what we have learned and why a given strategy worked);
• Activate schema.