Explicit Reading Instruction in FYLCP
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According to an ACT study (2010), 48% of freshmen are not college-ready in reading even though 85% of college learning comes from independent reading (Baker & Brown, 1984). Reading instruction, outside of developmental courses, is rarely addressed for first-year students. The course redesign will contextualize reading comprehension instruction in two first-year learning communities in Fall 2012. The goal of the redesign is that students will learn effective college reading strategies and transfer those skills to other courses. If a measurable improvement is demonstrated with the pilot study, contextualized reading comprehension instruction will be implemented in all first-year learning communities.

The need for contextualized reading instruction

Basic skills instruction aligned with content is not only effective for students needing remediation (Perin, 2011; Tinto 2012). Because there is this huge disconnect between comprehension expectations in college and student performance, explicit reading comprehension strategies should be contextualized in the classroom. They should be implemented in a regular core course not only because some students lack these skills, but most students lack the ability to know when and how to implement the strategies effectively (Chung, 2005). All students struggle to read at the level expected by their professors and need support to succeed.

FYLCP Structure

The Physical Geology learning community, known as Triad G, consists of a 60-seat Geology lecture, Geology lab and First-Year Seminar. Triad G students are Environmental Science or Geology majors. Tetrad N is a 60-seat learning community comprised of United States History from 1865, Developmental Math, First-Year Composition and First-Year Seminar. Students in this community are not any particular major.

Selected comprehension strategies

Questions/Question. The QAR model. Asking students questions about their reading before, during, or after is a well-known and widely-practiced comprehension strategy that helps students connect the text to their own knowledge base. (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Durkin, 1978). In the 1980s researchers found strong evidence that Question-Answer-Relationships (QAR) as a method of asking questions can drastically improve reading comprehension and can spur students to think deeply about the texts they read (Raphael & Au, 2005, Raphael & McKinney, 1983, Raphael & Pearson, 1985, Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985; Yopp, 1988). Pearson and Duke (2005) note evidence that QAR is best taught using a comprehension routine such as reciprocal teaching. A reading comprehension routine greatly increases a student’s ability to comprehend a text (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Summarization. The GIST model. In a meta-analysis, Duke and Pearson (2002) assert that explicit instruction and practice in summarization improves students’ ability to summarize texts, their comprehension of text, as well as recall of content. Cunningham’s Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text (GIST) model requires students to consider a text on a macro level, leaving out trivial information. Students must synthesize the big ideas from a text in just 15 words (Cunningham, 1982). The explicit instruction should include teacher modeling, whole-group practice, and small-group practice. Finally, students complete the process with individual practice (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Studies using younger participants found reading comprehension performance exceeded those of students not receiving explicit instruction in a summary strategy.

Experimental Design

A multiple-probe across-students design using multiple baselines was chosen to avoid denying treatment to one group of students (Horner & Baer, 1978; Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker & Deshler, 2002). As in Hughes, et al (2002), baseline, instruction and maintenance will serve as conditions. All students will receive at least two baseline probes consisting of reading scores on college entrance exams and a strategy interview conducted within the same time frame. Instruction occurred in First-Year Seminar courses.

Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

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