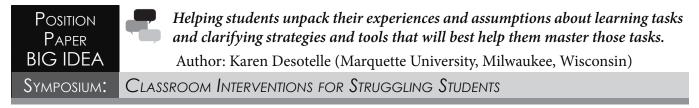# Classroom Interventions for Struggling Students

Symposium

Facilitator: Tris Utschig

Abstract: Faculty see a wide variety of incoming capabilities in their students, often with 10 to 30% of their students struggling to keep up. This symposium focuses on practices that individual faculty have found that help these students succeed (thus improving pass rates, especially in difficult courses). Five different refereed papers will be shared in the program notebook where short presentations and facilitated discussion of participants will identify 20 principles that are used to increase student success in individual courses.

Papers & Panelists:

Notes

POSITION PAPER
BIG IDEA

Helping students unpack their experiences and assumptions about learning tasks and clarifying strategies and tools that will best help them master those tasks.

Author: Karen Desotelle (Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

SYMPOSIUM: **CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS**

Background on concept: Faculty and support staff in higher education commonly attribute student academic failure to inadequate skills development or lack of innate ability to succeed. To remedy student academic failure, institutions offer a plethora of "developmental" coursework and/or workshops on isolated study skills and/or one on one meetings to exhort students to try harder, meet more regularly with their faculty, and take advantage of institutional resources. In some cases, when students do all they are asked to do and still fail, they are referred for testing for potential disabilities or deemed unfit for higher education.

Concept: Yes, basic factual and procedural knowledge skills are important for success in disciplinary coursework, but how students learn in higher education is generally misunderstood as simply a skills issue – both basic skills and study strategies that can be taught in isolation from the disciplinary course material. I suggest that students who struggle in higher education typically use and apply, uncritically, their habitual patterns of thinking and learning that grow out of their high school experiences. In order to help students recognize and apply learning approaches that are appropriate to disciplinary learning in higher education, students need assistance unpacking their experiences and assumptions about learning/the learning tasks in front them, and then clarification of strategies and tools that will best help them master those tasks.

How this looks in our practice: In our practice, we meet with students who request one-on-one assistance to both assess and provide instruction appropriate to each student's level of sophistication in college learning. In the introductory assessment, when asking students why they seek help, typically they provide answers that reflect their belief that academic problems stem from their own lack of skills or the inability of others to make classroom material accessible to them. From our experience, complaints of this type reflect the learning experiences that have defined school for them prior to college. More specifically, they perceive their learning success issues as a matter of skill development (a trick or tip that they can learn or that their faculty should teach them which will result in better grades) or a result of external, uncontrollable forces (poor or super smart instructors that teach ineffectively). This perception, that mastering the disciplinary content of college learning is a simple matter of better memory strategies or better teaching grows out of both the structure of high school learning (which often translates into memorization of small amounts of information) and the easy success many Marquette students have experienced in that environment (usually these are students with very good memories).

In our work, we have identified two key differences between high school and college learning. These center on who is responsible for learning and what type of learning results are rewarded (a euphemism for "how to get better grades given the work you do" – the thing that motivates most students to seek help with study strategies). We use an individualized student centered approach to reconcile student beliefs against the actual academic challenges they face versus the learning tasks they imagine. We walk them through the context of high school learning where high school teachers must assure that learning takes place (schools are legislatively required to assure student success), and where the types of learning most prevalent in high schools represent the tasks of memorizing and recalling small groups of details or disconnected concepts (an approach that often leads to success on state and national "success" assessments).

We then show students how in their college materials, the responsibility for learning shifts to them. This shift, both implicit and something most students have not practiced/experienced, is made more difficult by the change (implicit again) in the nature of the learning tasks. We point out that instead of high school teachers taking responsibility for teaching until each student has mastered a fact or concept (verified

through graded homework, frequent quizzes, and tests on small amounts of information), faculty teach for conceptual mastery, assuming students will apply themselves outside of class to achieve mastery and seek help as necessary. Indeed, first year students who seek help from their college instructors, often report disappointment that their faculty didn't help them (meaning the instructor didn't identify the students' specific problems and find resources or support to resolve them as would have happened in high school). Instead, faculty might suggest students study harder (they may already be studying as hard as they know how) or recommend they seek tutoring or study skills services (a suggestion that can be a self-esteem blow for students who intuitively believe they are smart because they always got A's in high school).
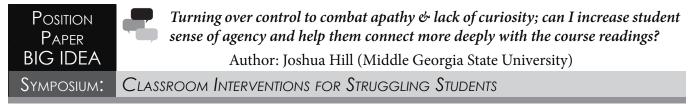
Finally, and most importantly, the kinds of learning tasks students encounter in higher education require students to recognize facts often only have meaning as they relate to larger concepts and to each other. Our experience has shown us that students can very persuasively use words rotely memorized to describe a concept and accurately parrot the language of the concept, but fail to apply this memorized information meaningfully in their papers and exams. In his seminal work, *Thought and Language*, Lev Vygotsky[1], the father of sociocultural learning theory, describes this type of thinking as "pseudo-conceptual" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 139) thinking, an intermediary type of thinking between simple memorization of words and definitions and true conceptual thinking. The words sound like conceptual thinking, yet are not truly representative of concept mastery because they won't permit the student to recognize the concept in a form that isn't identical to the form in which it was memorized. This phenomenon accounts for why many faculty, when quizzing students on their understanding of material are puzzled when they hear "concepts" coming out the mouth of students, but student performance on exams doesn't reflect that perceived understanding. Students reach this level of "understanding" by memorizing all their PowerPoint notes, notecards, study guides, etc., over an extended period before the exam (a significant time commitment), without knowing how to "see" the relationships and organize concepts according to their larger relationships. For this reason, their performance on exams and other assessment measures will fall far short of their expectations based upon time expended.

The philosophy undergirding our services grows out of our experience working with students in the midst of these struggles. Specifically, we aim to assist students unpack the whole of their learning experience in high school and at Marquette in order to help them recognize and separate those things related to learning that are under their control (and hence subject to change or alteration) and those that are outside of their control (the amount of material they must master, the nature of testing situations, the due dates and grading percentages for each graded event, etc.). From this exercise, we identify the specific course or courses about which they are most concerned, and work directly with the student and his/her course materials to identify or refine strategies that have proven most effective relative to mastering the disciplinary concepts of the course or courses.

Through this process, we hope to assist them recognize two things: First, the ineffectiveness of many of the habits/unreflective behaviors they bring from high school that might inhibit their academic success (e.g., studying ten hours the night before the exam; procrastinating on studying because no one collects or grades their daily homework; focusing disproportionately on tasks/items due tomorrow and neglecting the larger, more crucial, more painful, more complex projects/papers/study tasks); and second, based upon their current approach to learning, the steps they might take in order to reorient their learning to better recognize and master their academic tasks in order to approach their learning from a disciplinary conceptual focus rather than detail oriented perspective.

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1   Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and Language.* (Translation newly revised and edited / by Alex Kozulin) Cambridge: MIT Press.

POSITION PAPER
BIG IDEA

Turning over control to combat apathy & lack of curiosity; can I increase student sense of agency and help them connect more deeply with the course readings?

Author: Joshua Hill (Middle Georgia State University)

SYMPOSIUM: *CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS*

Abstract: In ten years of teaching, I have heard the words "Why are we reading this boring story?" more times than I care to remember. If I ask students who complain what they would rather learn or read about, I am usually met with blank looks. Apathy and lack of curiosity are two of the greatest obstacles that many college students face but are particularly dangerous for students in remedial courses. To combat this, I hypothesized that allowing my students to select the essays covered might result in a greater buy in on their part. Giving them control of that aspect of the class also might have the additional benefit of helping them to connect more deeply to the reading and increase their sense of agency in the classroom. During the first week of class, I broke the students into groups of two or three and gave each group several days to choose two essays from the textbook. Each group was tasked with the responsibility of leading a classroom discussion/presentation for their peers on the essays it had chosen. In their presentations, the groups were asked to generate a three question quiz, highlight the main ideas of the selection, discuss the author's purpose in writing the piece, point out any evidence used to support the author's argument and its efficacy, and generate a list of at least five unfamiliar vocabulary words. To assist the class with this somewhat daunting assignment, I spent the first three weeks of the semester modeling the process using readings that I selected. The results have been mixed, but overall I believe they indicate that this experiment has merit.

In an effort to foster more student involvement with the learning process, I allowed them to self-assign into small groups, which then selected two or three readings from *Acting Out Culture* for class discussion. The groups were tasked with guiding the discussions for the readings they chose while I facilitated and assessed their progress. The groups were responsible for providing the following information about their readings:

- A three question quiz
- The main idea, thesis and supporting details/information from the reading
- A list of between five and ten important/unknown vocabulary words with their definitions explained
- A personal reaction to the selection
- Three discussion questions, two of which could be selected from the lists at the end of the reading and at least one original to guide classroom discussion
- A writing prompt either selected from the list at the end of the reading or group-generated
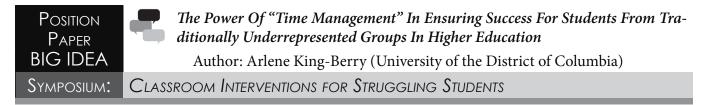
I spent the first three weeks of the semester modeling for them. I made sure to explicitly demonstrate each part of the checklist as we came to it. After the three weeks concluded, groups were given a weekend to meet and decide which essays they wanted to claim, and they posted their requests on the class discussion board on D2L. Here, the diversity of the selections in *Acting Out Culture* worked in my favor. The sixty essays leave a big intellectual footprint, and even the most skeptical students were able to find one selection that was interesting to them. Once readings were selected, I generated a lottery to fairly determine when the presentations would happen. While the groups were working on their presentations, I was generally hands off, but I made sure to monitor progress, offer suggestions, and keep them headed in the right direction.

Instead of getting up in front of the class and pretending to be me (which did happen on several occasions to the students' joy) or playing at being the teacher, they took their roles as class leaders quite seriously, and with one or two exceptions, the groups performed well. The more vocal students enjoyed having a forum

and audience, and the whole class participated in debates and sometimes heated arguments multiple times a week though the students were rarely rude or disrespectful to one another. This assignment was a daunting task for the less socially confident members of the classroom; I know from my own experience that public speaking before a group of peers can be an extremely nerve racking experience. I was delighted when I saw how much encouragement and support the class showed towards the shier presenters. The students also held one another accountable for the quality of the presentations. Twice the class took groups to task for not fulfilling the parameters of the assignment; they asserted that if they were able to do the assignment, then no group had any excuse for doing less. This kind of accountability helped pull the class together as a cohesive unit, and the whole class became involved and engaged in the learning process. By the middle of the semester, I had sick students showing up because they didn't want to miss out on the day's presentation, which is something I had never encountered before in my teaching career.

Notes

POSITION PAPER BIG IDEA

The Power Of "Time Management" In Ensuring Success For Students From Traditionally Underrepresented Groups In Higher Education

Author: Arlene King-Berry (University of the District of Columbia)

SYMPOSIUM: CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

Student success is guided by professors, supplemented with a variety of digital and print media, and coordinated with peers and professionals in the field. However, success is only achieved when students understand, conceptualize, and claim their power to achieve success by effectively managing their time. This paper summarizes the power of time management as derived from the reflections and strategies of a professor and student at a Historically Black College.

Reflection#1

Mary was planning to study on Monday. She received a call from Lorita, a good friend, who convinced her to take a break and embark on a short ride with friends. Mary got into the back seat although she did not recognize the driver or the other passengers. The car was driven at a high rate of speed to a part of the city with which Mary was unfamiliar. Mary heard someone in the neighborhood scream, "He's Cappin!" Everyone, but Mary, immediately jumped out of the car and hid; she thought the person was shooting a cap gun like those toy guns she frequently heard in her part of town. Mary saw sparks in the air, but was merely startled and confused, rather than afraid. Shortly after, Lorita ran over to her and said, "That was a Gun! Why didn't you hide? Get in the Car!" Later that night Lorita called Mary and told her that the car in which they had ridden had been stolen. Mary then realized that she needed assistance in making choices because she could have been shot, killed, and/or arrested for riding in a stolen car.

Reflection #2

Brenda, a single parent with two children ages 10 and 16, constantly juggles her class schedule with that of her children. Brenda is an early riser; she gets up at 4:30 a.m. each morning and retires at 9:30 p.m. Upon arising she bathes, dresses and relaxes for one hour before beginning the daily family routine of preparing for school. She drops the children at school by 8:30 a.m. and then travels to her job. During breaks and her hour-long lunch period Brenda relaxes, returns personal calls or responds to text messages. She drops the children off at her mother's house while she attends class from 5:30-9:30 p.m. on Monday through Thursday. On Friday, after school, she takes the children to McDonald's for dinner, returns home and they all go to bed at 9:30 p.m. Saturday is a leisurely day during which the children help with chores and complete homework. It is often difficult for Brenda to concentrate because of interruptions from the children or cell phone calls. On Sunday, the family attends church services; after dinner Brenda finally settles down to study. Brenda does not understand why she does not have enough time to study.

Time Management Strategies

Time Management refers to the way individuals manage the events in their life with regard to time. Much like money, time is both valuable and limited; it must be protected, used wisely and budgeted. When students understand, conceptualize and actualize the power of time management, they are more productive, have more energy, feel less stressed, get more things done, relate more positively to others, and feel better. Following are a few strategies designed to start students on a productive time management journey.

Develop a *Daily Log* - Begin by writing down what you do every hour for one week. Use a personal planning tool such as a daily diary, personal digital assistant, cell phone or wall calendar, etc. Begin

recording your activities in the morning when your rise and continue until bedtime. At the end of the week, review your log and note: (a) what time of day you were productive, (b) when and how much time you devoted to family, household chores, job responsibilities and coursework. A log such as this could help Brenda determine what she actually accomplishes in a week. She might find that early morning was the best time for her to study. She might decide to take the children to the library on Saturday morning, enabling her to rack up some study time while also modeling good study skills for her children to emulate.

Establish priorities - Determine your goals for the semester. Ask yourself what objectives/outcomes would lead to accomplishment of those goals. Create a weekly "To Do List" distinguishing tasks that are *important* from those that are *urgent*. Be sure to Include creative activities (e.g., dreaming, thinking and reading) on the list. A strategy to identify priorities would enable Brenda to choose activities that would facilitate completion of family responsibilities and allow sufficient time to study.

Ask for help - Consider assigning certain tasks to someone else who has the skills to complete the task. For example: (a) Brenda might assign some of the household chores to her children; (b) she might join a carpool freeing herself from having to transport her children to and from school every day: (c) she could also seek help from a professor, advisor or counselor to address concerns she may have regarding coursework, money management, or emotional support.

Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today - Organize your study space and get rid of clutter. Avoid multi-tasking when tasks are overwhelming; tackle one task at a time. Try breaking down major academic tasks into smaller segments that require less time and result in specific, realistic deadlines. Reward yourself for completion of each segment of the task.

Do not let external factors waste valuable time - Well-intentioned family and friends can sometimes unknowingly sabotage your efforts and cause you to waste valuable time. Therefore, you should establish regular time periods to text and return calls. Let others know when you are available to talk or meet with them.

Regularly revisit your priorities – Reflect on your daily log of activities and make the necessary adjustments to ensure appropriate use of your time.

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POSITION
PAPER
BIG IDEA

What Every Educator Needs to Know about Course Reading: Utilizing the Reading Methodology to Engage Students in Reading for Lifetime Learning
Author: Julie White (Grand Valley State University)

SYMPOSIUM: CLASSROOM INTERVENTIONS FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS

Every educator has been in a situation where she has assigned classroom homework that students only partially complete. In my case, the outside class work involves reading—a subject that is often neglected by students. The handful that decide to crack the book rely on genius recall, having no notes or stray marks in the margins to demonstrate any level of engagement with the text. This fall, to more fully engage my students with reading, I plan to introduce them to the *Process Education Reading Methodology*, teaching them how to utilize a Reading Log in order to comprehensively engage with a text and will collect data using a pre and post evaluation to track their critical thinking skills and reading progress.
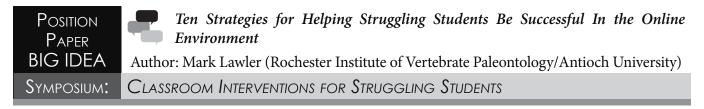
At Grand Valley State University, I work with primarily first-year writers so I face the challenge of engaging them in reading. After assigning essays for homework that were critical to the course activity I had planned for the following class, I found that students had not thoroughly engaged in the reading. Circulating around the room, I observed that very few students had engaged with the text, jotting notes or highlighting in their books. It became clear that students were not engaging the text and thinking critically about the reading I had assigned and many had read nothing. In my course, WRT 150, "Strategies in Writing," students are required to complete approximately 200 pages of reading through various distributed essays as well as the course reader. Students are surprised by the substantial amount of reading in a writing course. However, reading and writing are integrally connected and require a balance of comprehension, critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis skills.

In frustration, I began to examine the students' reading "process" (or lack thereof) by assigning an essay to be read during class and listing a few questions on the board to help students think critically. What I discovered was quite perplexing—students didn't demonstrate any "tools" during their reading process—absolutely no engagement with the text beyond scanning the letters with their eyes. Even though they had class time to complete the reading, I was disappointed in the lack of physical engagement students were demonstrating with the text. No one used a highlighter (must be a homework-only technique in their minds) and few bothered to pencil anything in the margins or take notes in their notebooks. I did notice, however, a few students answering the board questions in their notes but they were only making surface connections with the text. Because the text was fresh in their minds, we had a richer discussion immediately following the completion of their reading. However, when I asked the students to delve deeper into the discussion, many struggled to make critical connections with the text. If I wanted richer paper content demonstrating critical thinking skills in their essays, it became evident that I needed to "teach" students reading strategies to help them learn how to engage effectively with their reading material.

Although last semester, I introduced just a few of the techniques discussed in the *Process Education Learning to Learn Reading Methodology*, it really heightened classroom discussion and enriched homework reading responses; however, I cannot say there was a direct correlation to their critical thinking in their own essay writing since I only introduced students to parts of the Reading Log and did not expose them to the reading process until late in the semester. This fall, I will introduce my first-year writers to the Reading Log early in the semester. We will cover the initial steps (1-7) of reading: understanding the purpose of the reading assignment, setting a time expectation for completing the reading, scanning for challenging vocabulary, setting objectives and performance criteria for the reading activity, completing a quick outline, and offering brief notes. Then, once they gain an initial understanding of the reading process, we will work on steps 8-12: doing a comprehensive read by asking questions, completing a synthesis of the material and then integrating and assessing what they have read. Even if students do not complete a Reading Log for all future

readings, I hope that the skills that accompany learning how to read comprehensively will be transformative in their reading abilities not only in education but in their reading for a lifetime.

Notes

Ten Strategies for Helping Struggling Students Be Successful In the Online Environment

Author: Mark Lawler (Rochester Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology/Antioch University)

Abstract: *In this concept paper, ten strategies for helping struggling students be successful in the online environment are described and discussed. Examples of how each strategy can be employed within the framework of online teaching pedagogy are provided. Practical applications of each strategy are framed within the context of the facilitation of online science courses. However, the strategies and techniques discussed can be utilized within any discipline.*

Introduction

Online learning continues to grow providing opportunities for students to pursue complete degree programs (including graduate programs) completely online having never to set foot on a campus. Many working professionals are also able to pursue professional development opportunities providing the flexibility that busy working adults need. With this flexibility sometimes also comes frustration and disillusion regarding online learning. Online learners need to be proactive, and they need to take ownership of their own learning. Students taking ownership of their learning is one of the key components of the PE model. Not all students are ready to take ownership, and is why some struggle to adjust, or fail to adjust at all, and end up dropping the course. Students are empowered to think critically, to dig deeper for understanding. They are encouraged to utilize their prior knowledge to relate, and add understanding to their current learning. Students are required to seek knowledge on their own, and from their peers. Approaching student learning this way creates some frustration, but through frustration, authentic learning is accomplished.

Following, I discuss ten strategies designed to help students who feel overwhelmed, isolated, and lost in the online classroom, yet have the desire, the attitude, and work ethic to not only complete the course but also thrive in the online environment. These strategies are based on nearly 15 years of experience teaching physical and natural science courses online (Owen, et al., 2015).

Ten Strategies To Turn Struggling Online Learners Into Successful Ones

My intention here is to provide a conversation starter, for further detail, and discussion on these strategies see Lawler, 2012, Owen, et al., 2015 and Babb, et al., 2014.

1. **Students as Instructors and Mentors**. Students often gain more from a learning activity when they are teaching their peers a new topic. Not only do they learn the material because they are teaching it, but their classmates often receive peer instruction and assessment of their work more openly than if it came from their instructor. I suggest that most students who are struggling in an online course feel confident and competent with some component, some concept in the course that some of their classmates may not. Allowing this student to teach their classmates instills a renewed sense of accomplishment and success which often transcends to other areas of the course content as they gain confidence in their ability to be successful in the online world.

2. **Passion.** Passion is contagious. If an instructor exhibits a passion for the subject(s) that he/she teaches, the enthusiasm, the excitement cannot but help to make its way to the class, or, at least, a portion of it. Students who are struggling are more likely to respond to an instructor who exhibits passion and excitement for the subject that they are teaching than one who acts is if they would rather be somewhere else, with little interest in what they are teaching. The struggling student will likely exhibit the same desire and wish to be somewhere else other than the classroom, and is unlikely to complete the course successfully.

3. **Frequent and effective Feedback.** Specific and frequent feedback on how a student can improve their performance is vital to their growth. Students crave feedback from their instructors, not only on how they can improve but also when they are doing well. Positive affirmation goes a long way to encourage the struggling student and provides the motivation needed for them to press on even if things are not going as they had hoped or planned.

4. **Caring about students.** Building a relationship with students is important for building trust, and commitment to the learning process. Students need to know that they can trust their instructor and know that they do care about them as people, not just as students. Willingness to work with students through personal, or health challenges, and letting them know that you believe in them, and in their ability to complete the course goes a long way in their success or failure in the course. Getting their commitment and willingness to continue working on not only mastering the course material but also increasing their comfort level in the course. I think this is an important talking point here; student struggles are not always with the course concepts and assignments but rather with online learning itself, the feeling of isolation, of being out of their comfort zones and not the course material itself. It is important for student success that this distinction is recognized and addressed by the instructor.

5. **Self-Assessment and Reflection.** Assessment and reflection are two critical aspects of the transformation of learning.   Assessment provides students with feedback on how they can improve their performance, free of judgment. Assessment is completed by the instructor as well as the student. This combination of instructor and student self-assessment allows the learner to improve their performance, to master new learning skills before being evaluated. For the struggling student, the pressure is lessened knowing that they are not continually being evaluated and judged but rather assessed and are informed of the assessment which is aimed at improving student performance.

6. **Teamwork.** Collaboration makes many of us uncomfortable but also produces some of the best learning opportunities and the acquiring of new learning skills. This ties in very well with number 1 above, students as mentors. Collaboration and teamwork can help a struggling student by learning from his/her peers, rather than the instructor while making important contributions to the group and receiving feedback and assessment from their peers, rather than just the instructor. Group dynamics can be a tricky thing to manage and requires very specific guidelines for its formation and operation, as well the clear assigning of roles and the expectations of these roles. If managed properly, collaboration can provide a support system for the struggling student where he/she is likely to interact with others who are also struggling which allows them to feel less alone, less isolated, and encouraged to push through and not drop the course.

7. **Hands-On Activities.**   Getting students out "into the field" to experience first-hand what they are learning in the virtual classroom is important for attaining long-term knowledge and self-growth. Many of the courses I teach are field-based courses. The fact that they are online does not preclude me from requiring students to step away from their computers and embrace actual experiences that reinforce what they are learning by actually doing. The struggling student is forced to step away from what has them stuck in the same negative feedback loop of perceived failure and allows them a fresh perspective. This new perspective has often provided renewed enthusiasm for what was previously rather stagnant learning, which has suddenly come alive. This can be the spark that reignites the interest and enthusiasm in a student that had previously struggled as seeing concepts and ideas in a new light renews their determination to finish the course strong.

8. **Real-Time Discussions and Chats.** I incorporate these into all of my classes, and while not always initially appreciated by students, many come to appreciate their value. It provides an opportunity to connect with their classmates, as well as their instructor. It fosters a connection to others and lessens the feeling of isolation. Again, for a struggling student, this connection can mean the difference between success and failure.

9. **Being available.** Success in the online environment from the perspective of both the student and instructor demands commitment in both effort and time. I provide all of my students with my home and cell numbers as well as my e-mail. Being available for students seven days a week I understand is not what every online instructor cares to do. However, students often reach out to me, struggling, panicking about how to navigate the course, how to submit an assignment, or are struggling to grasp a concept. If a 10-minute phone call can relieve their concerns, and they feel better about their performance and possibility for success in the course, I think it is very worth it.

10. **Being flexible.** It is critical that students be accountable and responsible for adhering to course policies and expectations. However, an instructor should also be flexible enough to help students who are new to the online world, or who might be struggling personally or medically get off on solid footing. Being too rigid and unwilling to be flexible with course expectations can derail an online student before they even get started.

Conclusions

These ten strategies for helping struggling students achieve success in online learning are those which I have found to be the most valuable for helping students who are either struggling with the format of online learning or the concepts presented to attain success. This success may encourage the learner to want to engage in additional online learning opportunities. As stated at the beginning of this paper, the goal here is to stimulate a conversation about best strategies to help these struggling students. To see examples of how these strategies can affect student success, see Lawler, 2012, Babb, et al., 2014 and Owens, et al., 2015.
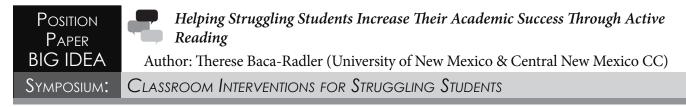
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Notes

Reading is not just the act of decoding written or printed matter. It is making meaning of that matter and expressing it in a different forms. Reading is an active process of interpretation, understanding, evaluating and application. It is an essential component to academic literacy which is the basis for critical thinking, problem solving and expression, all of which contribute to academic success.

Students learn in different ways and it is important that they organize personalized study plans to meet the needs of their individual learning styles. Once an effective study plan is in place, students must gain some understanding of what it means to be an active reader. Although study plans may vary from person to person, there are some common characteristics to active reading. Active reading requires high levels of organizational thought and include organizing study time in a way that is tailored to individual reading and comprehension needs. Active readers focus on each reading assignment independently and adjust their study plan accordingly. Active readers interact with what they are reading and take notes in order to increase understanding. They also ask questions and make predictions as they go along. Active readers take what they understand from a reading and apply it in a variety of forms.

Taking notes while reading is called annotating. Annotating is an essential part of the active reading process. It ensures that readers are monitoring the reading material as they go along and it increases overall reading comprehension. Although annotating is something that is required by teachers across curriculum, it is something that is often very unclear to students because of its variability. It is for this reason that I have come up with a three step approach to introductory annotating that has proven effective with struggling students. That three step method is as follows:

1. Highlight or underline the topic sentence (or the sentence that best describes what the paragraph is about) in every paragraph.

2. Use margin notes to write any important details that are left out of the topic sentence.

3. Circle and define any unfamiliar words.

This is by no means the only way to annotate, but it a concrete organized way of annotating that serves as a good basis for struggling students. After annotating a reading in this manner, students are able to go back and review what they have annotated while actively reviewing their own comprehension and understanding of the material. Students are then able to use what they have learned through the expression of critical thinking and problem solving in a variety of forms.

Decoding words is only a part of the reading process which contributes to academic literacy and success. Active reading is a process that requires a great deal of organizational thought which includes a number of different strategies, including but not limited to annotating. Active reading increases levels of comprehension and application and essentially leads struggling students to academic literacy and success.

Work Cited

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2. Hoeffner, L. & Hoeffner, K. (2015). *Common Places: Integrated Reading and Writing*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Education.

Notes