

**GLOSS IN ACTION: GLOSS USED IN REMEDIAL  
READING CLASSES TO IMPROVE COMPREHENSION  
OF EXPOSITORY TEXT**

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Students at a residential treatment center for neglected and delinquent adolescent boys were having problems reading expository text. As the reading instructor, it became my responsibility to identify and employ strategies that would improve their comprehension. One of the strategies that was used was marginal gloss (Otto et al, 1980).

Marginal gloss was used to improve comprehension of text that was written two or more grade levels above a student's reading ability and contained content in which a student did not have substantial background knowledge. Marginal gloss consists of carefully designed activities that are used for the dual purpose of guiding the reader in processing the text-specific content and providing the reader with practice in reading to strengthen his reading skill. Activities are placed on worksheets. In the left hand margin of each sheet brackets are drawn so that when a worksheet is aligned with a page in text the brackets direct the reader to the exact lines where the reader can find the content to complete the activities. Marginal gloss seems to offer maximum cuing for the student inviting the reader to interact with the text, rather than interact with the teacher to acquire meaning.

To illustrate how gloss was used at the treatment center, three situations will be presented: (1) Using gloss with a severely reading disabled student; (2) Adapting gloss for efficient use with content-area texts; and, (3) Using gloss to facilitate use of a single-level text with students of varying reading abilities.

**A severely reading-disabled student**

Bill was twelve years old and had very little schooling. By throwing severe tantrums upon arrival at school, he learned from young how to be sent home. As he got older, his tantrums

became more severe and vandalism and assault accompanied his outbursts. The school system could no longer tolerate his behavior and he was sent to the treatment center.

At the center Bill was enrolled in the remedial reading program. Testing showed that he was at a primer level. He was very nervous about learning how to read. In his initial sessions in reading class, he would hit his fists on the walls, writhe his hands, and pace the floor. Extensive work with Bill, using texts written with a gradual progression of difficulty, improved both his reading proficiency and his self-confidence. The next step was to move Bill from simple narrative text to expository text.

This transition to expository text was very timely. Plans were being made to send Bill to a neighboring public school. At the school he would have to be able to work with expository writing in content-area textbooks. Bill had virtually no background knowledge in the content areas. So a dual goal was established of not only developing the process for reading content-area textbooks, but also developing a knowledge base in content-area subjects. To achieve the goal the text *Regions and Social Needs* by Laidlaw was selected. This text is generally used as a third grade social studies text. The topic chosen for the first unit was desert life. After deciding on the text and the unit, I glossed the text.

A spiral notebook was used in which questions were placed on the back of each sheet in the tablet. The questions focused on the major concepts that were developed in the unit. Brackets were added to the left-hand margin of each sheet so that when the sheet was aligned with the appropriate page in the text, the brackets would point to the lines of text where the content could be found to answer each question. In a typical session, Bill would be assigned several pages to read in a section. After reading the text, he would then use the gloss to help him process the major concepts such as characteristics of desert plant and animal life, and how people live in different deserts.

Gloss was used to help Bill gain the information. Another step in the process was to help him maintain the information. Reading plans (Dana, 1980) were used at the end of each section in the unit to help him remember what he had learned. A reading plan is a skeletal diagram of the text made up of headings to represent the major concepts. Lines and arrows connect the headings to show the relationships of the concepts within the text. Space is provided with each heading so that the reader can fill in the facts that develop the major concepts. Using the facts from the marginal gloss activities, Bill would fill in a reading plan. He would then have a summary sheet of the major concepts to use as a study aide to help strengthen his retention of the content.

In a year and a half, Bill's reading score went from a primer level to a 3.8 grade level. He was enrolled in a public school and succeeded. He was eventually sent home and now attends school on a regular basis.

#### Efficient use of gloss

The second situation in which gloss was used at the treatment center was to assist students who could not read several pages of a content-area textbook and answer simple literal questions on the content. But, unlike Bill, these students did not exhibit as much anxiety nor were they as reading disabled.

Developing a marginal gloss tablet for each student would have been impossible. So I modified the technique. Many content-area textbooks contain question boxes interspersed throughout the text. These questions are used to determine if the student has understood the main concepts covered in the text. I located several textbooks with question boxes directly in the text. Next, using strips of tagboard six inches long and two inches wide, marginal-gloss strips were constructed. At the top of the first strip of tagboard, I wrote the page numbers the student was to read before answering the questions. After reading the pages, the student would come to a question box in

the text. The marginal-gloss strips had a question number, page number, and brackets for each question. To make sure that the brackets would point to the right area in the text where the student could find the answer to a question, lettered slashed-lines were included on each strip and in the text. By matching the same lettered slashed-lines in the text with those on the marginal gloss strips, the two would be properly aligned and the student would know where to find the answer to a particular question. The student would then write the answer to the question in a notebook.

The number of marginal-gloss strips would vary depending on how many questions were in a question box. The strips had a hole punched in the top and were held together with a metal ring so that each strip could be flipped over when it was completed. When the student was finished with all the questions in a question box, he would get his next set of marginal gloss strips.

For most of the students after working with several sets of strips in one textbook a "fading" process began, and student dependency on the strips began to diminish. They were able to recall the information needed to answer a question or could recall the place in text where the information could be found without having to rely on the strips as a guide.

This technique was both efficient and effective. Marginal-gloss strips could be prepared quickly because of the question boxes already in the text. Use of the strips seemed to help the students understand and remember the content.

#### Single-level text

The third situation in which marginal gloss was used at the center was to assist students as they read the drivers' education manual. Students who were going to public schools to take drivers' education were all failing. Several of them approached me for help. The major problem in developing a program for them was having to use a single-level text for students with reading abilities that ranged from third-grade level to eleventh-grade level. Since my schedule could not accommodate private tutoring sessions for all the students, marginal gloss offered a possible solution.

I spent a year developing, testing, and refining the gloss for the drivers' manual. Student involvement helped to improve the materials. For each chapter in the manual there was a separate packet of gloss. Reading plans were also designed for use with the manual to strengthen retention of the content.

In the second year, the drivers' education program was opened to all the students. Twelve students enrolled in the first course. For each chapter the lower level students worked with a packet of marginal gloss, used the packet to fill in a reading plan which was referred to as an open-book test, studied the plan, and took a closed-book test that was designed following the format of the Department of Motor Vehicles' test. Higher level students simply read a chapter, filled in the reading plan, studied the plan, and took the closed-book test. If any student desired, he could take his materials to his room and work on them in the evenings. After a student completed all the marginal gloss packets he was given a cumulative test and a final grade for the course.

I observed an interesting effect taking place while the students worked with gloss. Once they became accustomed to the process of locating information and became more familiar with the content, an automatic "fading" from the need of the brackets in the gloss took place. By the end of the second chapter most of the students no longer needed the marginal-gloss brackets unless the activity was very difficult. Several students were even able to advance from using marginal gloss in the first two chapters to simply using reading plans for the final chapters.

The effectiveness of the drivers' education program seemed positive. Out of the twelve students taking the first course,

nine completed the program.

Marginal gloss is a strategy that was used successfully in several situations to help students having difficulties reading expository text. The effectiveness of the strategy is particularly noteworthy because of the nature of the students. Most of the students had not been successful in school and were easily frustrated. They required instruction that resulted in success. Marginal gloss afforded them success in reading. There is a need to further explore the merits and limitations of this strategy.

#### REFERENCES

Dana, C. The effects of using a graphic advance organizer before, during, and after reading on the comprehension of written text (Technical Report No. 545). Madison Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Individualized Schooling, 1980.

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