

*Dennis S. Davis*

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# Internalization and Participation as Metaphors of Strategic Reading Development

*Many studies of comprehension strategies instruction rely on an internalization metaphor of strategy learning. In this view, strategies eventually enter students' heads after repeated interactions with teachers who introduce strategies and control how they are used. In this article, the author discusses the limitations of the internalization view and proposes an alternative model of strategy learning. It is argued that learning to read strategically is really a process of learning to participate in textual interactions using the language and procedures of strategic readers. The author lays out specific components of strategy learning consistent with this participation view, including: coming to view reading as a strategic process; mastering the pro-*

*cedures and dialogue of strategic reading; and considering the possibility for resistance of the strategic reading identity. He describes key issues made evident by the participation metaphor that teachers should address as they continue to teach comprehension strategies.*

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Dennis S. Davis is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Correspondence should be addressed to Professor Dennis Davis, University of Texas at San Antonio, Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching, One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249. E-mail: dennis.davis@utsa.edu

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I had the pleasure of collaborating with a first-year teacher, Ms. Price, as she worked to improve the reading comprehension of her fifth-grade students. Our framework was inspired by research-based approaches to *multiple comprehension strategies instruction* (MCSI) in which students are taught to coordinate repertoires of strategies for monitoring, repairing, and enhancing comprehension.

Ms. Price turned out to be a phenomenal reading teacher, blending the direct explanation and modeling used in Transactional Strategy Instruction (Schuder, 1993) with the cognitive apprenticeship of Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar &

Brown, 1984). She and her students could often be found relaxing in the corner of her classroom using their strategy knowledge to discuss shared readings. During one of these discussions, Ms. Price scaffolded her students' use of a clarifying strategy to resolve a comprehension difficulty, or *alarm*, while reading aloud from *The Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2003).

Ms. Price: [pausing, with an animated, confused look on her face] Is anyone hearing an alarm right now? I am really confused. It says *Their diminishment is nothing short of terrifying*. To me, right now, the word diminishment is stopping me from understanding this sentence. Let's read through it again . . . [re-reads the sentence aloud]. What could diminishment mean?

Student 1: I think diminishment means that when a king cries, it doesn't make him a king anymore. Like, he's not different from the rest. . . . He's nothing but a little wimp.

Ms. Price: [laughs] He's nothing but a wimp?! His daughter was kidnapped! Does that make him a wimp?

Student 1: No, but he's crying like a wimp.

Ms. Price: She made a really good point. He's acting like a normal person. So what do you think diminishment might mean?

Student 2: I think it means *the same*.

Ms. Price: When he's acting the same as everyone? Yeah, to diminish is sort of like to—

Student 3: —to change!

Ms. Price: It is like change, but is it change that gets better or change that gets less or worse?

Several students [together]: Worse.

Later during the same read-aloud, Ms. Price reminded students that one of their major comprehension goals is to construct a visual image of the story's events, which she calls a mental movie.

Ms. Price: How many of you had a mental movie when the king was crying and Despereaux first saw him?

Several students: [raising hands] Me.

Ms. Price: Who wants to describe it real quick? . . .

Student 4: The king was crying and he was sitting there with tears at his feet.

Ms. Price: Okay, he had tears at his feet. What else did you see?

Student 5: He's sitting on her bed.

Ms. Price: Good! I like that you put him in the bedroom. [Looks back at text] Yeah, he's on the daughter's bed. I didn't even have that detail in my head. Great job. Thanks for helping my movie.

My experiences working with upper elementary readers lead me to agree with the positive appraisals of these types of strategy-oriented discussions in several recent reviews (e.g., Block & Duffy, 2008; Dole, Nokes, & Drits, 2009; National Reading Panel, 2000). Descriptions of learning in the MCSI literature are often based on an internalization metaphor—a belief that students develop into strategic readers as strategies enter their heads through repeated classroom interactions. In this article, I guide the reader through a thought experiment to examine the complementary understandings that emerge when a participation-based metaphor is used in addition to the internalization metaphor. I am aware of the dangers of pitting one learning metaphor against another (Sfard, 1998). My intention is not to claim that participation is a more correct metaphor, but to highlight the questions and issues related to strategy learning that this metaphor makes evident.

### Internalization in the MCSI Literature

Vygotsky (1978) defined internalization as a series of stages through which cognitive abilities develop. These abilities are located outside of the learner in the social world before they move inward as part of an individual's cognition. This move from external to internal is thought to occur through semiotic mediation, principally language. For example, one might hypothesize the following developmental pathway for Ms. Price's fifth-grade students. First, a student is

found to have difficulty constructing meaning from a text. In response, the teacher guides the student to use a set of reading comprehension strategies. The strategy set is initially owned by the teacher, but it soon comes to reside in shared communication among the teacher and students, and eventually it becomes part of the student's reading performance repertoire. At this point, the strategies have been internalized; they have moved from the teacher's mind to the social environment, and finally, to the child's mind.

It is common in the MCSI literature for researchers to draw explicitly or implicitly on this internalization sequence when describing the expected learning trajectories of students (e.g., Klingner & Vaughn, 1996; Pressley et al., 1992; Souvignier & Mokhlesgerami, 2006). This trend is not surprising given that MCSI is typically situated within a socio-cognitive framework that views social interaction as the key mediator of individual cognitive development.

### **Participation as a Learning Metaphor**

The participation metaphor conceptualizes development as a process of increasing participation in a group activity (Matusov, 1998; Rogoff, 1990). This perspective is in line with Lave and Wenger's (1991) description of participatory learning. As a legitimate peripheral participant, a newcomer is able to engage in the practices of a community, gradually taking on more and more responsibility until he/she is a full participant.

From this perspective, learning to read strategically is a process of identity development in which students learn to become a particular kind of reader. In this section, I briefly describe three of the major components of this process made visible using a participation metaphor.

### **Gaining Intersubjectivity With Other Group Members**

Because the MCSI tradition traces its roots back to information-processing views of psychology (Jiménez, Handsfield, & Fisher, 2008), reading in MCSI classrooms is defined largely

as a problem-solving activity that is facilitated by consciously attending to one's mental processes. To become strategic readers in an MCSI classroom, students have to shift their definition of successful reading to match this view. This alignment of understanding is referred to as intersubjectivity (Wertsch, 1979).

Consider how students might come to be aligned with this definition in Ms. Price's class. The first time the class meets together on the carpet for a read-aloud, the students and the teacher may perceive the task in different ways. Depending on the students' previous experiences with read-alouds, they might think the object of the activity is to recall the author's intended message or simply to sit back and enjoy the story. Ms. Price, on the other hand, may intend for the students to actively monitor and debug the way they visually imagine the author's message. Similarly, the student and teacher may have different conceptions of the process of making meaning from text. A student whose previous teacher prioritized silent independent reading may be surprised by Ms. Price's insistence on collaboration. This lack of shared understanding makes it difficult for the student to interpret the teacher's initial strategy talk. They may think to themselves, "Why is she stopping so often to talk about her thinking?" or "Why doesn't she just read the whole chapter like my other teachers?" At this point, the child and the adult are simply not playing the same game (Wertsch, 1979).

Over time, the child's understanding of the purpose and processes of reading will begin to more closely approximate that of the teacher until the child's conception of the task and that of the teacher fully overlap (Wertsch, 1979). What the child learns during MCSI is not merely a set of strategies; he or she is drawn into an intersubjective relationship with an adult (or any strategic reader with influence) through a process of apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990).

### **Mastery and Appropriation of Cultural Tools**

In the sociocultural tradition, a tool is any device that one uses to act on the world (Wertsch,

1998). Comprehension strategies are mental tools used by readers to facilitate their understanding of written text. These tools are adopted by readers as they align themselves with MCSI norms. In addition to the strategies themselves, readers must also adopt a specific way of talking about those strategies. One of the distinguishing features of the language of comprehension found in MCSI classrooms is the frequent use of strategy terminology (e.g., *mental movies* and *alarms* in Ms. Price's class) to describe mental activity (Englert, Tarrant, Mariage, & Oser, 1994).

When a learner has demonstrated expertise in using a set of strategies, these strategies are said to be *mastered*. When the learner accepts the strategies as his/her own—i.e., adopts a strategic orientation as an important feature of his/her reading identity—the strategies are said to be *appropriated* (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1998). Students who master strategies can use them; students who appropriate strategies do use them. Students can master the ability to use strategies without fully appropriating them. In other words, they can learn to use strategies in response to teacher prompts without actually becoming strategic readers.

### **The Possibility for Resistance**

Potential members can choose to resist the preexisting tools and practices of a community (Wertsch, 1998). This component of participation highlights the role of student agency in the learning process, an issue that is largely hidden in the internalization view. Not all students will choose to appropriate the strategy-oriented view of reading or the specific strategies sanctioned in an MCSI classroom. Resistance is not necessarily defiant or uncooperative; some students might resist because the classroom norms bump up against contrasting beliefs about the characteristics of successful reading shaped during previous home or school experiences. Sometimes, this resistance will result in the introduction of innovative or revised strategies, which other members can take up or resist. Other times, the potential members may remain outside of the community indefinitely.

### **Implications of the Participation Metaphor**

Three recommendations for classroom instruction and assessment are presented in this section. These recommendations are meant to expand the way teachers think about their strategy instruction, but they should not replace the effective practices teachers are already using that emerge from an internalization view of strategy development (e.g., direct explanation and explicit modeling).

#### **Teachers Should Encourage Collaborative Strategy Use**

The participation metaphor makes it clear that teachers should provide opportunities for students to use and discuss strategies with their peers. Ms. Price gave students frequent opportunities to talk about their reading processes in small groups. Students would share with each other the parts of text that were difficult for them and help each other find ways to construct clearer understandings. It was during these discussions that students practiced the metacognitive language of comprehension that is characteristic of MCSI.

Teachers should use these discussions as opportunities to observe and assess students' strategic participation. The internalization metaphor suggests that although strategies are learned during social interactions, the ultimate marker of successful strategy development is a student's ability to independently apply strategies when working alone—for example, on a comprehension test. The assumption that social and individual cognition can be described separately from each other has been criticized by learning theorists working from a sociocultural or sociogenetic perspective (see for example, Matusov, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Winegar, 1997).

When learning is thought of as participation, the outcomes of strategy instruction are not just recognized by examining how students perform on independent reading measures, but also by examining the quality of their strategic contributions during shared reading activities. Instead

of thinking of collaborative strategy discussions as a scaffold that helps move students toward independent mastery of strategies, teachers should recognize that increasing one's participation in socially mediated strategic interactions is itself a legitimate learning outcome.

As part of their regular observational assessments, teachers should ask: Does the students' participation suggest appropriation of a strategic reading identity or simply mastery of strategies when they are prompted by others? This question is important because it will help teachers understand different levels of affiliation with the strategic reading community. Imagine, for example, that Ms. Price notices that one of her students is able to monitor her comprehension and identify alarms, but she only does so when Ms. Price explicitly prompts this strategy. This suggests the student has mastered the strategy without coming to own the strategy as part of her personal participation repertoire. In this case, Ms. Price might want to individually confer with the student to better understand her use of this strategy. During this conference, Ms. Price might learn that the student regularly monitors her comprehension but resists sharing her alarms in group interactions because she does not feel comfortable making her reading difficulties public. Alternatively, she may learn that the student was simply not aware that she should be initiating strategies on her own when they are not assigned. In either case, Ms. Price can use the knowledge she gains to support this student and others as they improve their participation in strategic interactions.

### **Teachers Should Critically Examine the Content of MCSI**

Another benefit of the participation metaphor is that it highlights the need to question the origins of the content taught during MCSI. Knowledge is never ideologically neutral and often favors the experiences of some groups over others (Giroux, 1988; Pennycook, 2001). This may be particularly true for comprehension strategies instruction, which has been criticized for propagating inflexible views of what counts

as effective textual interaction, and for privileging the cultural and linguistic thinking patterns of mainstream students (Handsfield & Jiménez, 2008; Jiménez et al., 2008).

When observing students' collaborative interactions with text, as suggested, teachers should consider students' preexisting beliefs about the reading process. Students who enter the class already in alignment with the strategy-focused emphasis on identifying and troubleshooting comprehension difficulties will likely flourish early on. Students whose previous experiences with reading have shaped diverging beliefs may have trouble adopting the teacher's preferred practices. These individual differences represent expected developmental variation and should not be interpreted as differences in ability or potential.

More important, however, is the need for teachers to make it clear to their students that the strategic reading practices sanctioned in the classroom are one set of practices that are useful in one setting, but they may not carry the same capital in settings with different participation norms, such as out of school and digital spaces. In fact, teachers should keep in mind that the individual strategies that have become popularized—namely, summarizing, predicting, questioning, and clarifying comprehension difficulties—are not the only, or even the best, strategies for all students. When designing their strategy instruction, teachers should be attuned to their students' preexisting strategic repertoires and make room for new or revised strategies to bubble up and become part of the sanctioned repertoire.

Ms. Price demonstrated this tenet of participation-based MCSI through her careful selection of strategies. She recognized that her students did not enter her class as blank slates; they brought with them several years of experience with successful and unsuccessful strategies (Anderson & Roit, 1993). While drawing ideas from the empirical research base of MCSI, she selected strategies based on her understanding of her students' strengths and needs. She formed these understandings through careful observations of her students while they worked collaboratively and individually.

These observations allowed her to uncover the strategies students were already using and to identify productive strategies that were not being used. These strategies were then made public for other students to begin trying out as they worked together in small- and whole-group discussions.

### Teachers Should Recognize That Strategies Are Multifunctional

Recall that the participation metaphor depicts strategy learning as a process of identity formation—students are expected to take on the habits, values, and language consistent with MCSI as they become members in a strategic reading community. This metaphor reminds teachers that students sometimes use strategies to make themselves appear to be successful readers so they are judged positively by their peers and their teachers. The internalization metaphor assumes that comprehension strategies serve mainly to increase cognitive efficacy during reading. It may be the case, however, that strategies serve multiple functions, some of which are more social than cognitive (Wertsch & Rupert, 1993).

Imagine that after a few days of working with the mental movie strategy, a student in Ms. Price's class uses the strategy on her weekly reading assessment. The student may have invoked the strategy because it genuinely helps her comprehend the text, but other possibilities must also be considered. She may invoke the strategy as a way of complying with the social expectations for overt strategy use that have been established in the classroom or to improve her normative standing with the teacher (Wertsch & Rupert, 1993).

If students are routinely engaging in strategy talk just for the sake of looking good, they may actually be wasting valuable time and energy without improving their participation in textual discussions or their independent comprehension achievement (Handsfield & Jiménez, 2008). Teachers must be careful to avoid creating collaborative spaces in which students learn to use strategy terminology in empty, inefficient ways (e.g., discussions in which students are encouraged to articulate every personal connection or inference

that comes to mind without addressing how these actually enhance the group's collaborative understanding of the author's message).

The recognition that comprehension strategies are multifunctional is useful as teachers assess and plan their strategy instruction. Teachers must pay attention to whether or not students can use a set of strategies and why they use them. This requires teachers to provide opportunities for student-initiated strategy use, followed by regular conferences in which students are allowed to explain why certain strategies have been invoked.

### Conclusion

This article describes two metaphors, one that conceptualizes strategic reading development as a process of acquiring strategies and another that foregrounds the process of becoming strategic (Paris & Paris, 2001). The participation metaphor is a useful complement to the internalization metaphor because it reminds teachers to prioritize social and individual strategy practice, to consider the perspectives and strategies students bring with them, and to be clear about the origins and limits of the strategies being taught. This metaphor also makes evident the need for teachers to observe students during group activities and note the quality of their strategic interactions. When conferring with individual students, teachers should ask them about their strategy choices, recognizing that sometimes strategies are invoked for social rather than cognitive purposes. These practices will make MCSI more empowering for students and allow teachers to better tailor their instruction to individual needs and contexts.

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