

Reviewed Works:

Reading Power (2nd Ed.). Beatrice S. Mikulecky, & Linda Jeffries. New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1998. Pp. iv + 300. ISBN: 0201846748. \$25.87

More Reading Power. Beatrice S. Mikulecky, & Linda Jeffries. New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1996. Pp. iv + 300. ISBN: 0201609703. \$27.13

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Reading Power (2nd Ed.) (*RP*) and *More Reading Power* (*MRP*) have a lot to offer both teachers and students in academic situations. I have used both texts in teaching academic reading courses for international students at the university level.

RP is aimed at 'high-beginning' level students, and *MRP* is aimed at 'low-intermediate' to 'intermediate' level students. Both provide a variety of exercises to improve students' reading. They are based on what Mikulecky and Jeffries (M & J) define as a process approach in which students are always encouraged to pay attention to their reading processes (*MRP*, p.290). They also aim to have students examine their reasoning processes and promote their metalinguistic awareness by giving them many opportunities to work on exercises in pairs or small groups (1996, p.290).

Each textbook consists of an introduction, four main parts, charts for record-keeping purposes, an answer key, and a teacher's guide. In the introduction, the authors present their justifications for why they think reading in English is important as well as brief descriptions about each part in the textbooks.

Part One focuses on pleasure reading. The aim is to introduce students to extensive reading and encourage them to develop the habit of reading for pleasure. The authors provide a rationale for extensive reading, principles of successful extensive reading, information on setting goals, a list of books that students can start with, and record-keeping charts that students and teachers can use to monitor their progress.

In Part Two 'Reading Comprehension Skills,' M & J point out that students' reading difficulties are often based on how they approach a text. They also claim that students can improve their comprehension by understanding how information is presented in English and by an awareness of the cognitive processes involved in reading (1996, p.293). These form the foundation for eight sections:

- Scanning
- Previewing and predicting
- Building vocabulary
- Identifying topics that are common among groups of words
- Identifying topics for paragraphs
- Understanding paragraph patterns
- Skimming
- Making inferences

Each section begins with a rationale, followed by exercises sequenced from easy to difficult. *MRP* has two additional units, identifying main ideas and summarizing.

While the two textbooks target different levels of students, the comprehension skill-building units are quite similar. The major differences are the level of vocabulary, the length and the complexity of reading passages, and the level of cognitive involvement involved in doing the activities.

Part Three, Thinking Skills, may appear to be unrelated to the aim of these textbooks, viz., to improve students' reading skills. However, M & J claim that "learning to read well in English means learning to think in English" (1996, p.297). The exercises in this part are designed to have students attend to syntactic, semantic, or logical clues in order to follow the way in which ideas are presented in English. The exercises are also carefully sequenced in terms of length and complexity to help students make a smooth transition from "translating from English to their first languages" to "thinking in English" (p.297).

Part Three also has a number of short paragraphs made up of simple sentences ranging from three to ten; the last sentences are always incomplete. Students have to think about an ending which would complete the sentence logically, and pick up one from four possible endings. In *RP*, there are 25 sets of five exercises, which means there are in total of 125 exercises. In *MRP*, there are 100 exercises.

It is Part Four that makes these two textbooks unique and different from other reading textbooks, as it provides exercises for increasing reading rates. M & J provide two reasons why students should learn to read faster (1996, p.206, p.297). First, students in academic contexts usually face large number of reading assignments. They tend to take a much longer time to complete these readings than their native English speaking counterparts, so that there is little time left for them to absorb what they are supposed to learn from the readings. Second, students can improve their reading comprehension by learning to read faster. Before students actually start to practice learning to read faster, the authors provide some preliminary exercises in which students can

understand the rationale for the timed reading activities, for checking their reading habits, and for learning how to do the timed reading exercises.

In *RP*, there are 40 timed reading passages about an American family. The first half of timed reading passages is 200 words in length, and the second half is 400-words long. Students read a passage while their teacher or they time their reading rate, and they answer eight questions about general points in the passage. After answering the questions, they can check their answers in the answer key and write their scores (the numbers of correct answers) on the Faster Reading Progress Chart. They can also find their reading rate on the Reading Rate Tables and mark the Faster Reading Progress Chart according to their reading rate.

In *MRP*, there are a few things that are different from *RP*. There are 30 timed reading passages comprised of three different topics, Hawai'i, Maria Montessori, and Global Issues. Each topic has ten timed reading passages 500-words long.

At the end of both texts, there are charts and tables that students can use to monitor their progress throughout their use of them. Moreover, an answer key comes with both of the textbooks, so students can use the textbooks on their own outside their classes.

There is a teacher's guide for each volume, in which M & J provide detailed explanations about how to use the textbooks, including the teacher's role in reading class, planning reading classes, and how to make the reading class exciting and effective.

A real strength of these textbooks lays in Part Four 'Reading Faster.' As far as I know, no other reading textbook provides such an exhaustive selection of timed reading passages. M & J emphasize that students should read faster and, at the same time, maintain a high level of comprehension. In addition, the timed reading activities come with Reading Rate Tables and Faster Reading Progress Charts, making it is easy for students to do the exercises on their own, to keep records of their reading rates and comprehension scores, and to see their progress visually. Furthermore, by seeing their progress, students can set their own goals in the timed reading activities.

Another unique aspect of these textbooks is that M & J introduce extensive reading in Part One, and that students are carefully instructed to choose books to read for fun on their own. Teachers can use the information in the teacher's guide to help students get started with extensive reading. Even if teachers are not familiar with extensive reading, they can grasp how important it is for students to engage in extensive reading and how to incorporate extensive reading components into reading class.

As previously mentioned, the exercises provided by M & J in Parts Two, Three, and Four are based on "a process approach," in which students are encouraged to pay attention to their reading processes (1996, p.290). I think the exercises in these parts can also promote students' metalinguistic awareness very effectively. For example, students have many opportunities to work in pairs or small groups, which helps them to think about their processes of reaching particular answers, to verbalize their thoughts and reasons, and to be aware of how they approach reading texts. In some of the scanning exercises, students are given opportunities to make their

own questions for their classmates, which helps them learn to ask questions as they read (1996, p.294).

The teacher's guide is also another strength of these two textbooks. It provides detailed descriptions about exercises and procedures as well as explanations on how to use the textbooks. Since the exercises in the four parts are designed to be used in consecutive order to maximize students' learning, M & J list four different types of reading classes in terms of hours of classes in one semester with brief outlines of these classes.

The volumes do have some limitations. First, *RP* targets 'high-beginning' level students while *MRP* is designed for 'low-intermediate' to 'intermediate' level students. I used exercises as supplemental materials from *RP* for an intermediate level academic reading class, and those from *MRP* for an advanced level academic reading class. Neither was completely appropriate for both classes. Some exercises from *RP* were too easy for the intermediate level students, but some from *MRP* were too difficult. Likewise, some from *MRP* were too easy for the advanced level students. Thus, I had to adapt some exercises to meet my students' level and look for other materials that were more challenging for my students. I think that it would be very useful if there were a textbook in *RP* series designed for 'high-intermediate' to 'advanced' level students.

Second, the timed reading activities are intended to help students improve their reading rate while maintaining a high level of comprehension. Unfortunately, the comprehension questions following the timed reading passages ask about general ideas in the passages, not about important points of the passages. Some of the questions are vague, and students may not always agree with the answers in the answer key. The level of difficulty of the questions is not consistent; some questions are too easy but some are rather difficult.

Third, I used the timed reading passages from *RP* in the intermediate level reading class for one semester. When we started to do the timed reading activities, I had no idea about my students' reading rate. After using them a couple of times in class, I noticed that most of my students were able to read much faster than the rate *RP* assumed. I thought about using the timed reading passages from *MRP* for this class and showed one of the passages to my students, but they told me that they were too challenging for them, and that it would take longer to do a timed reading activity. Thus, I had to create new reading rate tables and faster reading progress charts for my class.

Finally, the reading passages in *RP* and *MRP* come from a variety of sources such as book review articles, newspaper articles, advertisements, excerpts from an encyclopedia, dialogues, play scripts, excerpts from an autobiography. This variety allows students to have valuable experiences in reading different kinds of texts in different ways. However, the courses I taught focused on academic reading, so students sometimes seemed to be uncomfortable in doing reading exercises using the non-academic readings in class, as these readings were not closely related to their needs in academic reading. Although I think that it is useful for students to have contact with and experience non-academic reading texts, I could not ignore the students' need to focus on more academic readings. I would like to use a textbook which has the same components as these two volumes but which also contains more academic readings.

The strengths of these textbooks outweigh their drawbacks. I recommend these two volumes to reading teachers who are looking for useful textbooks for their reading classes. *RP* and *MRP* can have a powerful impact on ESL students who need to learn how to read in English. I will definitely use *RP* and *MRP* again