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Study Habits of Preservice Teachers

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Abstract

It is reasonable to believe that an effective teacher has been trained to use a variety of methods and teaching strategies to help students learn in the teacher's specific content area. It is also conceivable to think that teachers are aware of study strategies. Teachers should know what it takes to be academically successful in that content area. However, it is when teachers do not possess this knowledge for themselves that makes one wonder "why not". This exploratory study investigated the study habits of junior level preservice teachers (N=96) as the first step in revising an online content reading course designed to provide reading strategies for preservice teachers in the content areas. The results showed that the majority of preservice teacher respondents listed factors related to the classroom (P-12 and college) and use of study aids as most related to their academic success. Implications for future research are included.

Keywords: Study habits, Pre-Service Teachers

1. Introduction

Psychologists have long realized that many students perform poorly in their academic work not because they do not possess the mental ability to do well but because they do not use the most effective methods of studying (Udeani, 2012). In fact, many students report that they have never been taught how to study and consequently try a hit and miss approach while wishing for the best. Many who are successful in obtaining a good grade on the first examination, just repeat the practice again. Unfortunately, some students are aware of only one way to study and apply that method to all subjects. They soon discover that this may not be the best strategy to use all the time.

As early as the 1920s, Carter (1921) wrote about his response to a high school teacher who requested the names of two or three books on "How to Study" for a student who was preparing to go to college. He wrote, "it is surprising that anyone could think that a list of study-habits or a statement about how to study could take the place of systematic training in study-habits during the child's elementary- and secondary-school life." Carter further states that too often teachers have not been trained in the technique of teaching study-habits (p. 696). He concluded his article by stating that teachers need definite constructive help in the actual technique of teaching study-habits and have a right to expect more of such help from professional courses, supervisors, and professional literature (p. 706). Iqbal (2010) reminds us that since "students are no longer required to memorise piece meal facts and isolated bits of information" we must utilize new pedagogical approaches whereby students play a more active role in their learning. The term "constructivism" relates to providing learners with an opportunity to construct their own knowledge and meaning, instead of cramming factual information. Learners who process information in such a way that it becomes a part of them are better able to share this information with someone else.

Malie & Akir (2012) report from their case study of students that teachers should be "knowledgeable about … study strategies so that they can use this knowledge to develop instructional materials and methods to suit students' teaching-learning relationships in order to achieve excellent academic performance." Some researchers note that there are many variables related to the effective methods of studying. Jarvis and Woodrow (2001) list reading books, doing problems, memorizing and practicing and learning from mistakes as variables related to learning. Wishart (2005) lists reading journals, reading online, hearing and explanation, and solving problems among their learning methods. Table 1 shows further research findings of variables related to studying.

Table 1: Factors related to Studying

Variable	Finding
Time of Day	Most students study in the evening and late at night. Research shows that students who study late at night tend to get worse grades than those who study in the evening (Markham, 2012).
Factors Related to the Classroom	Students should know what the expectations are for the class. Students should pay attention in class (Grohol, 2006).
Physical Location	Students who switch locations while studying improve their retention (Mack, 2010). Students who study in different rooms score higher than students who study in the same spot (Four Study Habits that Scientists Recommend).
Human Factors	Learning in shorter bursts is actually far more effective than concentrated studying (Mack, 2010). Students who study 30-60 minutes at a time retain more information (Grohol, 2006). Students should: • Space out sessions (Four Study Habits that Scientists Recommend). • Study over a period of days rather than waiting until the last minute (Markman, 2012). • Schedule a time to study even before the exam comes up (Markman, 2012) and keep the schedule (Grohol, 2006). • Think about how one approaches the task of studying over a period of days rather than waiting until the last minute (Grohol, 2006). • Think positively (Grohol, 2006). • Stay healthy and live a balanced life – exercise regularly and eat right (Grohol, 2006). • Take breaks and reward yourself (Grohol, 2006).
Study Aids	• Practice tests are far more helpful than repeatedly reading the material or even making outlines or concept maps (Grohol, 2006; Four Study Habits that Scientists Recommend) • Use flashcards (Golding, Wasarhaley, & Fletcher, 2012). • Study by testing yourself – most effective (more than flashcards for review) – teaching someone else you must really understand the material and requires practice and be able to explain it (Markman, 2012). • Outline and rewrite notes (Grohol, 2006). • Use mnemonics (Grohol, 2006). • Take notes in class. Research shows that as much as 1/3 of most students never look back at the notes again for review (Adams, 2011).
Environment	• Find a quiet place (Grohol, 2006). • Be careful about using a computer for taking notes- it could become a distraction (checking emails, playing games, etc.) (Grohol, 2006). • Work in groups or alone – everyone is different (Grohol, 2006). • Try collaborative learning (Adams, 2011).

Carter's (1921) article, mentioned earlier, further provides urgency for this study. It is imperative to provide preservice teachers with knowledge about study habits in order for them to be able to help P-12 students to become successful in learning. This knowledge must begin with preservice teachers taking a look at their own study strategies as a basis for going forward. Likewise, as instructor, I must use the results of this study to incorporate the skills needed for them to be successful.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects

Junior level preservice teachers (N=96) were participants in this study. Traditional students (those not holding another bachelor's degree) as well as those labeled as licensure-only (students who already held a bachelor's degree and were enrolled in the course to complete requirements for a teaching license) were allowed to enroll in the online content area reading course. The course was not offered in a face-to-face format. There were almost twice as many females (N=62, 66%) enrolled as males (N= 34, 33%). Data were not collected on age level of

students. Data were collected over a period of eight semesters. The purpose of the exploratory study was to investigate pre-service teachers' self-reported responses about aspects of their study habits.

2.2 Pilot Study

Data were retrieved from a class activity in which the participants responded to a Discussion Board prompt:

Recall the strategies you use for studying (include where, when, how, etc.). Discuss whether you have been taught how to study; whether you have certain strategies for certain subject areas; the perfect conditions for you to study, etc. What have you found to be the most effective way for you to study? What strategy gets you the most "A"?

3. **Data Collection and Analysis**

Responses from 96 students over a period of eight semesters provided narrative data for the pilot study. Participants responded to a discussion board prompt and submitted narrative responses through the online Blackboard Learning System. A content analysis of their responses was completed and yielded frequency data. Responses to the prompt produced six recurring themes relative to the six research related themes. The combined results of the recurring themes yielded 315 total frequency tallies. One tally was made for each occurrence indicating what the participant viewed as a factor related to academic success. To determine the categories from the student narratives, the researcher and graduate student tallied the data for consistently in determining categories according to research themes.

4. Results and Discussion

The six recurring themes were recorded as 1) time of day; 2) factors related to the classroom; 3) physical location; 4) factors related to them as humans; 5) study aids; and 6) factors related to the environment.

4.1 Factors related to time of day

For the first theme related to whether time of day mattered to their academic success, sixteen tallies or 5% of the total tallies were recorded. The results were equally distributed with eight tallies for each variable (night and morning).

4.2 Factors related to the classroom

For the second theme of factors related to the classroom, 70 tallies or 22% of the total tallies were recorded. The largest number of tallies (N=18) was recorded for "summarizing notes" which was noted by some preservice teachers as a strategy they remembered from middle school. The tallies were reported as follows for each factor: Reading every page (6); Having questions and answers in the class (3); Having an organized outline (5); Typing their notes (8); Repetition of information from teacher and self (13); Having voice recorded notes (4); Self-reflection on instruction's presentation (5); Reviewing class notes (5); Outlining notes (3); and Summarizing notes (18).

4.3 Factors related to physical location

For the third theme of physical location and whether it mattered in their academic success, 12 tallies or 4% of the total tallies were recorded. This item is related to "environment" but more specifically in terms of the body in a sitting position. The results were equally distributed with six tallies for each variable (desk and table).

4.4 Factors related to human factors

For the fourth theme of human factors related to their study habits, 58 tallies or 18% of the total tallies were recorded. The largest number of tallies (N=13) was recorded for "individual(s)" that was defined by some preservice teachers as what they did to affect their study habits to help themselves be more academically successful. One preservice teacher wrote, "It is really up to me that makes the difference." The tallies were reported as follows for each factor: Practice (11); Keeping a calendar (6); Going to sleep early (2); Putting yourself inside the situation (2); Seeing the "big" picture (5); Quizzing by a third party (4); Organization of information (9); Having a photogenic memory (1); Studying with a group of people (5); and Individual, indicating that results were based on what the student actually did to learn the material (13).

4.5 Factors related to the use of study aids

For the fifth theme related to the preservice teacher's use of study aids, 76 tallies or 24% of the total tallies were recorded. The largest number of tallies (N=15) was recorded for "highlighting – using different colors" and was explained as one aid that helped them while studying. The tallies were reported as follows for each factor: Graphic organizers (9); Making up stories out of test materials- mnemonics (12); Using asterisks (1); Using keywords (11); Making graphs (2); Making index cards (6); Highlighting – using different colors (15); Using note cards (8); and Using flash cards (12).

4.6 Factors related to the environment

For the sixth and final theme, preservice teachers listed environmental factors necessary for academic success. Eighty-three tallies or 26% of the total tallies were recorded. In other words, references to the environment were listed more often than any other themes deemed important to helping them be academically successful. The largest number of tallies (N=16) was recorded for having a "quiet" environment with the next largest tallies (14) recorded for "silence". Though very close in meaning, the respondents distinguished the two with terms such as in a "quiet library" or as "silence" with no one talking or the absence of music playing. The tallies were reported as follows for each factor: Silence (14); Studying in 20-30 minute to one hour intervals (7); Taking breaks (2); In a room with an uninteresting TV program on (4); Sitting near a window (5); Studying in a bedroom (11); Having a relaxed mood (5); Having the TV on – low volume (7); Playing classical music on low volume (12); and Quiet (16).

From these data as noted in Table 2, the researcher is better informed about what this group of preservice teachers feels are factors related to their specific study habits. The two areas of concern, which are more so related to areas for which the researcher can control, are factors related to the classroom and the use of study aids.

Table 2: Six Recurring Themes Related to Preservice Teachers' Report of Their Study Habits

Theme	Total tallies (N=315)	Percent of total tallies
Time of Day	N=16	5%
Classroom Factors	N=70	22%
Physical location	N=12	4%
The Human factor	N=58	18%
Study Aids	N=76	24%
Environment	N=83	26%

5. Conclusion

Preservice teachers responded to the prompt "*Recall the strategies you use for studying (include where, when, how, etc.). Discuss whether you have been taught how to study; whether you have certain strategies for certain subject areas; the perfect conditions for you to study, etc. What have you found to be the most effective way for you to study? What strategy gets you the most "A"?"* which contained six separate parts. Unfortunately, most respondents did not answer all parts of the question in a way that could be quantified for each part of the prompt. The responses were written in narrative format. However, from an analysis of the responses and using frequency counts of items related to the prompt, 24% of the tallies in the area of study aids and 22% of the factors reported were related to the classroom. Although the present pilot study offers significant information about these preservice teachers, there are three important methodology limitations that should be noted. First, because the study involved self-reporting there is the possibility that preservice teachers may have misremembered information about their study habits. Second, the prompt was only conducted with preservice teachers who were previously enrolled in courses taught by one instructor over a period of eight semesters. Preservice teachers enrolled in this course over the period of eight semesters were at different points in their educational experiences. Some participants had previous careers (those coming back to be licensed in education) while others were completing their first degree since high school. In conclusion, the present study offered an initial inquiry about what preservice teachers felt about their own study habits. One of the next steps will be to include specific assignments in the course that address the various themes related to study skills and strategies. It will also be important for preservice teachers to have an opportunity to investigate whether study skills are taught in the classrooms where they are assigned to complete their field observations. Discussing the issue of study skills with cooperating teachers in the field as well as with students in the classroom would make the experience more authentic for the preservice teacher.

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