Tobin 2019 Test Prep Tip #2: *Scanning*

Basic Rationale:

- ***Even though the MCAS is an untimed test, efficiency is critical***; students who waste energy through inefficient methods become fatigued far earlier than they should, and their performance suffers as a result. ***Being able to easily locate in passages sentences or sections covering particular topics is a very valuable skill that not all students have; identifying students who lack this ability and addressing their deficiencies can greatly improve the ease and speed with which these students work through passage-based test sections.***

What do you mean by scanning?

- By scanning I am referring to the two-part skill of **a) identifying a word or phrase that I can seek to help me to find passage sections covering the topic I am interested in**, and then **b) using my eyes to locate the chosen word or phrase within the passage WITHOUT actually reading through the text.**

    * This is **analogous to using a "Find" or "Find in this page" function embedded in a web browser**, with test-takers doing both the word of the web surfer (word decider) and the computer search program itself.

      - The seeker's eyes should "wash over" rather than read text during the search.

    * For example, if I want to check (as from the online 6th-grade MCAS CBT practice test) whether it is true that Gonzalez had known bird B95 since he hatched, I can a) identify words with the root "hatch" as words to search for, and then b) quickly and confidently determine whether any parts of the passage include these words and therefore evaluate the veracity of this statement.

Why is is worthwhile to teach the skill of scanning?

- Regarding the first part of the skill, **identifying key words that will yield desired information is a basic skill and part of using the Internet well.**

    * Ex. knowing what words to select for a Google search can make a big difference in finding the right information efficiently

- **Both identifying key words and scanning for them are very useful skills when composing evidence-based writing about printed texts such as books, for which electronic search functions are not available.**

- **With respect to testing** specifically, although the ELA MCAS includes numbered paragraphs, and many questions provide the numbers of the paragraphs where information can be found, **there are many multiple-choice and open-response questions for which paragraph or line information is not provided.**

    * **Students who have not mastered scanning tend to either a) avoid checking in the passage for evidence to back up their thinking or b) waste gobs of time re-reading text in search of the desired information.**

    * **Students who have mastered this skill are more likely to check answers in the passage, to find the answers they seek, and therefore to proceed confidently with their choices; not only do they get more right answers, but their small**

successes give them boosts of energy that help them maintain focus throughout the testing session.

Rx:

- **- Discussion, direct instruction, and guided practice**
  - * In my experience, **many students have simply never taken the time to consider much the parts of this skill and their usefulness.**
    - **- For these students, just directing their attention to the sub-tasks involved and when they are used can be helpful.**
  - * **The first part of the skill (identifying the words to search for) is easier to fit in to general classroom instruction. I would suggest spending some time**, preferably a very small amount on multiple occasions **when natural opportunities arise, calling attention to selecting words to seek and helping students analyze their choices.**
    - - Ex. When discussing a chapter or page of a novel and looking for evidence to support a particular assertion, take a moment to discuss what words will best help students identify the right portion of a page or chapter, and why.
      - * **"If we are looking for evidence of X, what words would we look for?"**
      - * **"Why wouldn't _____ be a good word to search for?"**
    - - The best words would be those guaranteed to turn up in the desired section that are least likely to turn up elsewhere.
  - * **Identifying which students have not developed the ability to scan visually** for selected words (instead of reading), and **addressing this deficiency**, **is probably best done in a 1-on-1 or small group setting, such as a guided reading group.**
    - **- These students may not be the ones you would first suspect!**
      - * I once tutored an adult with a journalism degree from Northeastern who was unable to scan text when I began working with her.
        - - She exhibited some characteristics of a person with an autism spectrum condition, but whether this is related to her development of the skill, I do not know; she did develop this skill with practice.
    - - **I have had success teaching scanning for text by demonstrating and explaining how I myself scan text for words without reading**
      - * **I suggest that instruction be explicit**, for example: "I do not read as part of this search; rather I am letting my eyes glide over the text in search of the sought-after word."
      - * *Where's Waldo?* books and the like can be used as examples
    - - **Students lacking scanning skills will need practice scanning text for words if they are to become fluent enough to apply what they learn in a testing situation.**