I came across *Reading Reminders* just as I was finishing Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s passionate advocacy of reading, *Ruined by Reading: A Life in Books*. Jim Burke may not have been exactly ruined by reading, but like Schwartz, he is a voracious and appreciative reader. Like Schwartz, he approaches this collection of practical advice about reading in the secondary school as an advocate. He wants to help busy teachers reconnect with the reasons they read, revisit some powerful classroom practices in reading, and help students internalize attitudes and strategies that will make them engaged and effective readers.

Burke’s previous publications, *I Hear America Reading: Why We Read, What We Read* (Heinemann, 1999) and *The English Teacher’s Companion: A Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession* (Heinemann, 1999) were resources for and celebrations of teaching. *Reading Reminders* continues the experience of being at a staff-room table with a knowledgeable and generous colleague.

As an English teacher who learned much of what he now knows about teaching reading on the job, Burke’s mantra is “Write the book you wish you had.” To this end, he has collected one hundred reminders of tips, techniques, and tools to help teachers successfully teach reading in their high school classrooms. The individual reminders are brief, each averaging two pages. Each contains a rationale and what to do; many also include examples of the technique or strategy as used by Burke’s sophomore English students, whom Burke graciously credits with helping him learn how best to help them improve as readers. It’s clear they’re in this learning thing together. The samples of student work that he includes illustrate the power of each tool or technique as a reading strategy, so teachers in other content areas should find it easy to translate appealing strategies into their own classrooms.

An overarching reminder in the book is that adolescents are more likely to be inexperienced than unable in matters of academic literacy. Burke conveys respect for teachers and for students as knowledgeable and resourceful. He believes that students can read and learn from challenging texts if teachers consciously support them with appropriate instruction. For this collection, he has chosen classroom ideas that he has found effective in providing this support, leading students to greater independence and competence as readers. Burke acknowledges the complexity of reading and asserts its rightful place as an emphasis of secondary content instruction. This comes as a welcome response to current calls for remediation of reading problems, often through basic skills instruction that is disconnected from a rigorous, engaging curriculum.

The book’s organization, as well as its content, reflects Burke’s conviction that academic reading involves complementary roles for teacher and student, with extensive practice and reflection from both. Reminders in each section point to:

- what teachers must do: establish a reading culture; teach and support students; evaluate your own teaching; evaluate your students;
- what students must be able to do: read a variety of texts for different purposes; use various strategies; develop their own reading capacity; evaluate and monitor their understanding, performance, and progress.

Burke acknowledges that many of the strategies and practices summarized will be familiar to teachers. He presumes that knowledgeable teachers will browse through the collection and find the practices that fit their needs. The space for marginal notes on each reminder suggests that teachers will adapt the strategies to fit their own teaching, given their texts and the needs and interests of their students. The one downside I see to this format though, is a possible impression that all the tools, tips, and techniques are equal in the expertise they require of teachers and their potential power for improving student reading. In reality, developing portfolio guide-
lines (reminder 35) is a more substantial undertaking than providing good directions (reminder 23), though both are arguably useful reminders to high school teachers.

Burke opens the book with the importance of creating a classroom community of readers, so it is fitting that reading reminder 1 is “Use Sustained Silent Reading (SSR).” Making space in the day for engaged reading in books of students’ choice is an excellent place to start. Burke acknowledges that teachers will have to consider available time and the demands of their course in deciding how much time they will devote to SSR, but he reminds them of its effectiveness in building students’ reading capacity.

One section in the second part of the book, “What Students Must Be Able to Do,” is “Use Various Strategies.” I like the reminder that reading strategies ultimately belong to students; the goal is to help them develop and control a range of reading processes. In this section appear reading reminders 54 through 74, including, for example, “Reciprocal Questioning (ReQuest),” “Survey Question Read-Recite-Review (SQ3R),” “Think-Alouds,” and “Reciprocal Teaching.” Burke is careful to note in the introduction to this section that reading strategies are more or less effective, depending on the student’s need, the demands of the text, and the task involved. What’s important is that students learn a variety of strategies in authentic reading experiences. In addition, they need ample opportunities to reflect on their own reading in order to determine which strategies work best for them and when. The big reminder here for teachers is to gradually recede from the picture, to shift responsibility and capability for monitoring and improving reading comprehension to their students.

The challenge for teachers in this section is to read with a purpose of choosing high-leverage strategies that meet the demands of their texts and the needs of their students. In a recent article in the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Elizabeth Moje and her colleagues suggest an ecological metaphor for deciding on reading strategies: Is watering plants effective? It depends. Similarly, in reading in the content areas, the value of a strategy depends on the circumstances. And in high school classrooms, teacher, students, texts, and tasks are all part of the circumstances. So as a teacher consults Reading Reminders, scanning the twenty strategies listed under “Use Various Strategies,” and asks “Should I teach my students how to use SQ3R? What about designing anticipation guides? Question the author?” The answer, ultimately, has to be “It depends.” Burke has provided a rich collection of reading strategies but wisely reminds teachers that they must decide if and when any of them fit their classrooms.

About the strategies, I have one caution. The brief descriptions provide a rationale and key components of the practice. The up-front investment of classroom time for some, “Draw the Action,” for example, need not be significant, and the directions provided in the book are adequate. Some of the strategies, however, will require more guidance for teachers, more careful scaffolding of instruction, and more commitment of class time. For example, teachers wishing to incorporate “Reciprocal Teaching (RT)” into classroom reading experiences will do well to provide instruction in as well as ample time to practice its component strategies of predicting, summarizing, questioning, and clarifying. RT uses social interaction to support engaged and effective reading of challenging texts.

Teachers who commit classroom time to learning and employing RT know that the payoff for students is worth it. Students gradually internalize the component strategies they’ve learned through interaction with each other. Over time, they can shift gears as they read on their own to make and revise predictions, question the text, clarify their understandings, and summarize what they’ve learned so far.

In appendix 2, Burke makes this point more generally, referring readers to resources with in-depth treatment of key strategies and ideas he has included in the book. Here readers will find a rich collection of references on important topics related to reading, among them “Student Engagement,” “Reading Across the Curriculum/Academic Literacy,” “Standards,” “English-Language Learners,” “Using and Developing Questions,” and “Reading Media.”

This is just one of forty-three appendices Burke supplies. Many are graphic organizers designed to be enlarged and reproduced for classroom use, for example the Cornell Note-Taking Form, Semantic Map, Vocabulary Square, and Story Board. Others, like his very helpful collection of reading standards in various discipline areas (appendix 32) will assist teachers as they plan instruction to support student reading in their content areas. The appendices remind me of Regie Routman’s blue pages, with their “here’s something you might find useful” invitation.

Reading Reminders is an invitation and a gift. Burke invites teachers to see that teaching reading in their discipline is teaching their discipline. The gift is his wide-ranging collection of ideas to make this a reality in classrooms with a variety of students, texts, and content.

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