FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

(Developed by Zygouris-Coe V., 2004)

Rationale:
An important element of reading comprehension is the ability to organize text. Organizing requires readers to focus on the major elements of a text and not only to decide what is important but also where it would go. Column notes share characteristics in common with the Cornell system: information is grouped according to its type, and then arranged in columns. We'll begin with 2-column notes, but you should quickly see that depending on the subject area, instructional goals, and the nature of the text, that 3-column notes are applicable too.

Two-Column Notes is a note-taking strategy that divides a page into two columns. Students like this because it only requires them to fold a piece of paper in half; "hot dog style" is what I used to call it. Students write main ideas and concepts in the left column and supporting details and information in the right column. This technique is especially useful for analyzing well-structured, content-rich, sequential reading selections.

Steps:
The Three-Column Notes graphical organizer can be organized in the following ways:

- **In the first column**, write the topic of the text or discussion.

- **In the second column**, write what you learned from reading the text, from research or discussion.

- **In the third column**, write your own opinions, observations, thoughts, and experiences regarding the topic.

The Two-Column Notes graphical organizer can be used in a variety of forms:

- **Main Idea-Detail Notes**–Students identify key concepts and their supporting details.

- **Opinion-Proof Notes**–Students isolate statements of opinion, bias, or limited point of view.

- **Hypothesis-Proof Notes**–Students identify predictions or theories and evaluate the evidence offered for their proof.

- **Problem-Solution Notes**–Students write the nature, causes, and effects of a problem in the left column and potential solutions in the right column.

- **Process Notes**–Students describe a process in the left column and then outline the specific steps in the process in the right column.

How to Use the Strategy:
This strategy can be used as a during-reading activity or post-reading activity after students complete a unit of study. It could be used as a during-reading strategy that teachers and students build together as they learn more about the related content. The choice is up to the instructor on when he/she best feels it would be appropriate to use this strategy. Make sure you first **model how to use the strategy** to your students and **explain why** you chose the Column Notes.

Ideas for Assessment:
One of our goals in reading is to maximize students' interaction with text—the more students get involved with

text, the higher the probability of them constructing meaning from text. Often, column notes responses form the basis for (small or whole) class discussion about the reading and can help the teacher informally assess students' understanding of key concepts. Students' motivation can increase as a result of their personal involvement and interest with text—class discussions will reflect students' personal ideas, inquiries, and questions. While evaluating the students' written work, it's important to keep in mind the following responses:

- Did students include key or relevant concepts/ideas to the topic at hand?
- Did they use this strategy accurately?
- How did they organize their responses from text?
- Do their notes show active engagement with text?
- Were there any content or conceptual gaps reflected in their notes that the instructor will need to follow-up with?
- Discuss the responses with the class—focus on how responses show understanding of the topic at hand.

(Click on the graphic above to go to a pdf file of the Column Notes worksheet or go to the html file.)

(Click the graphic above to go to a pdf file of an elementary example of the Column Notes Strategy.)

(Click on the graphic above to go to a pdf file of a secondary examples of the Column Notes Strategy.)

For more informative links on the Column Notes reading strategy:
http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/column.html
http://www.teacherstech.org/brown/column_notes.htm

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Go to Adobe PDF instruction page.

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