



# R.E.A.D.®

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Continuing Education for R.E.A.D. Teams

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## The Protégé Effect

### The Protégé Effect: How One Can Learn by Teaching Others

The protégé effect is a psychological phenomenon where teaching, pretending to teach, or preparing to teach information to others helps the person who is teaching learn that information. For example, a student who is studying for an exam could benefit from the protégé effect and improve their understanding of the relevant material by teaching that material to their peers.

Because of its beneficial influence, the protégé effect can be a useful tool in a variety of situations.

**This, in fact, is a phenomenon that some of our R.E.A.D. teams have discovered and applied in their R.E.A.D.ing environments. When the child is the teacher, helping the dog to understand the story, this helps the child learn more effectively than if the dog were not there.**

So let's learn more about the protégé effect itself and then talk about how it helps the children we R.E.A.D. with.

#### *Examples of how one can use the protégé effect*

- The protégé effect is primarily associated with the academic context, where teaching others can help one learn material that they need to learn themselves. But it can also provide benefits in a variety of other environments. For example:
- With hobbies, teaching basic skills to novices can help the teacher refine and master those skills himself.
- At work, explaining important procedures to

new employees can help the teacher remember those procedures better herself.

- Simply with general knowledge, explaining concepts that you're interested in to people who aren't familiar with them can help you improve your own understanding of those concepts.

#### *How the protégé effect helps one learn*

The protégé effect helps as a result of several psychological mechanisms, all of which revolve around the differences between how we learn information when we're learning for ourselves, compared to how we learn it when we expect to teach others, as well as when we teach them in practice. Specifically:

- Expecting to teach and teaching can lead to increased metacognitive processing, which makes people more actively aware of their learning process.
- Expecting to teach and teaching can lead to increased use of effective learning strategies, such as organizing the material and seeking out key pieces of information.
- Expecting to teach and teaching can lead to increased motivation to learn, since people will often make a greater effort to learn for those that they will teach, than they do for themselves.
- Expecting to teach and teaching can lead to increased feelings of competence and autonomy, by encouraging people to view themselves as playing the role of a teacher, rather than that of the student.

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### *The benefits of teaching others*

Teaching others facilitates one's own ability to learn the material through several mechanisms. Students who learn material *with the intention of teaching it later* perform better when tested on that material than those who learn it just for themselves.

Studies show that preparing to teach can also improve motor learning and enhance information processing when learning to perform physical tasks, such as how to hit the ball in golf.

There are other benefits to teaching others, beyond the improvement in ability to learn the material: improved communication skills, increased confidence, and improved leadership ability.

Preparing to teach increases people's motivation to learn the material, which serves as a mechanism to facilitate their own increased learning. The same is true of the increased feelings of competence and autonomy that people experience as a result of playing the role of the teacher, which are valuable beyond learning the actual material.

Note: some studies suggest that the fact that older siblings tend to have a higher IQ than their younger siblings can be attributed to the fact that the older siblings act as tutors in the family, at an age when they undergo significant cognitive development. This is an example of the powerful influence of the protégé effect and of its long-term benefits.

### *Summary and conclusions*

- The protégé effect is a psychological phenomenon where teaching, pretending to teach, or preparing to teach information to others helps a person learn that information.
- The protégé effect improves the learning process by increasing metacognitive processing, increasing the use of effective learning strategies, increasing motivation to learn the material, and increasing feelings of competence and autonomy.
- Beyond improving one's ability to learn the material, teaching others can also lead to additional

benefits, such as improved communication skills, increased confidence, and improved leadership ability.

- To take advantage of the protégé effect, one can learn the material as if they're going to teach it, pretend to teach it to someone, or teach it to other people in reality, or some combination of these techniques.

### *Taking advantage of the protégé effect in the R.E.A.D. Setting*

Are you beginning to see how this phenomenon can be a great benefit to the children who are reading to dogs?

Merilee Kelley of READing Paws in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Nevada and beyond, always talks to her R.E.A.D. teams about the protégé effect and how handlers can enhance its benefits for the children they R.E.A.D. with ***by having their dog ask lots of questions***. This produces many valuable learning opportunities for the child:

- Having the child explain particular words or elements of the story
- Stopping to discuss comprehension, and having the child explain to the dog his/her understanding of what's happening in the story
- Re-reading certain passages if the dog thinks the reader is going too fast to understand

***The protégé effect happens even if we are unaware of it. One of the coolest things in hearing about this phenomenon is how it validates so many of the techniques we have been using for years to make the experience not only comfortable, relaxing and fun but also a genuinely valuable process for learning. All our instincts have had scientifically correct underpinnings!***

Merilee also shares an insightful memory:

"When READing Paws first started in Tennessee, one of our very first venues was the Student Center at Vanderbilt University. This was back when students had textbooks (!!!) and they brought

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those textbooks to the Student Union prior to exams and piled all over the floor with the dogs. They explained the lessons and theories in the textbook to the dogs, and the dogs listened intently and posed questions to the students about the content— as they enjoyed the petting and strokes from students who dearly missed their own dogs left behind at home. After the “sessions” were

over, it was the students who expressed their total surprise at how much more knowledgeable they felt!! Much more confident that they had “studied” well—and would do well on their exams!

“Our teams had unknowingly implemented the Protégé Effect and marveled at how well it worked!!”

## Another Splendid Review

*This wonderful review is from the mom of a R.E.A.D.er at the Marion Baysinger Library in Groveland, Florida, where **Phyllis Warner & Romeo** volunteer. This daughter (as the Mom states) is neurodivergent and LOVES coming to R.E.A.D. to Romeo.*

★★★★★ 4 weeks ago

When you think of a library there are very engrained, specific images and nuances that come into in one’s head. Stacks of books, the nostalgic smell of old paper, the librarian with glasses around the edging of their nose, and the demand for silence.

This library doesn’t have any of those stuffy, boring things. Marion Baysinger Library is an absolute perfect place for children of all ages. From the wide variety of educational classes offered, online access to the entire Lake County library system, computers, WiFi, exceptional options for students of all ages, homeschooling enrichment programs, and extremely helpful and dedicated staff, this library takes all your preconceived notions of the typical library and shatters them.

This smaller than some, but very cozy and inviting library is colorful, fun, and charming. The staff are truly what makes this place shine in terms of what it has to offer. Jessica is so energetic and thoughtful. Susie is friendly, engaging, and encouraging. Mickey is sweet and always willing to answer your questions. Caitlyn is fantastic with the STEAM classes and very creative. Robert is quirky and committed to giving the patrons the best experience possible.

Their twice a month visit from Romeo and Phyllis in the fall, winter, and spring is truly a gift. READing Paws has given my kiddo an opportunity to learn compassion, patience, and kindness with animals.

We come to this library several times a month and absolutely adore the Wednesday story time and stay and play sessions. This is a perfect chance for children to engage in song, dance, educational enrichment, and social awareness.

Neurodivergent and neurotypical folks will find this library as a good balance between a calming atmosphere or a creative outlet for stimming. Be sure to check out their calendar of events and programs for the best possible experience.

I am so grateful for this amazing location and look forward to many more visits. Thank you so much for all you do to bring this fantastic library out of the stigma and into a new generation of learners!!

