Using a Personal Reading History

We are just about ready to begin fall classes. The students are ready to see what new and helpful ideas that you will have ready to assist them in learning discipline-specific content. Actually, the students do have some individual content that can spur their reading improvement, education their peers about the reading community within the classroom, and provide insight for the instructors in how students read and what experiences they are bringing into the classroom.

Reading Apprenticeship® suggests that classroom instructors begin with a personal reading history. The task may be open ended or more structured. The key is to ask about the personal reading history of each student. Typically, the question includes some or all of these items:

1. What personal experiences have contributed to your ability or challenges to read?
2. What have been some high and low points in your development as a reader?
3. How has reading helped you?
4. What reading skills or challenges remain difficult for you?
5. How has your understanding of reading changed since your attendance in class?
6. What experiences do you believe will assist you in strengthening your reading ability?
7. Do you find reading enjoyable?
8. How much are you reading?
9. What type of materials do you read?
10. Why is reading a skill you want to improve?

Or the task may be more course work focused as in a personal reading history developed for nurses:

1. What are high points in your learning how to read? How can you apply these to your reading in the nursing program?
2. What are some low points in your learning to read? How will these influence your reading habits in the nursing program?
3. Were there times in your academic life when you felt that you did not belong because of your reading skills and abilities?
4. How can you apply your lessons learned in reading to the nursing program?
In order to achieve a high quality response from students, personal reading histories should be assigned as individual work first. Once the students complete their individual responses, they should be asked to pair up with a partner and share their findings. Instructors can create a comfortable atmosphere by saying: Make sure that each of you has an opportunity to tell your story. What did you learn about each other? What are the commonalities? What were some surprises?

Then, the class as a whole should provide some insights into what they learned about each other and maybe their own reading histories. Instructors can elicit responses with: What are some of the common threads of your literacy development? The instructor should serve as a scribe writing down whatever the students contribute.

Why is doing personal reading history an important first step in your classroom? This is the beginning of the quarter and the academic calendar and as the instructor, your message is that reading is important, reading is complex, and reading is essential to our reader’s identity. Furthermore, by discussing reading, we are going to create a community of readers by fostering understanding about how we read, the purposes of reading different materials in different ways, and gather insights into the various reading processes. This activity can and does set the tone for a reading apprenticeship classroom.

For more information and supporting materials about creating a Personal Reading History, visit the RTC Library’s LibGuide about Reading Apprenticeship® and RATs (Reading Apprenticeship Teachers and supporters) at http://libguides.rtc.edu/rats. At the LibGuide, click on the Reading Apprenticeship Routines drop down menu, and then on the Personal Reading History option. There you will find:

- a video of RTC instructor Michele Lesmeister’s class creating their personal reading histories
- PDF files of ready-to-use Personal Reading History templates created by Michele
- links to websites and other videos about creating personal reading histories
- RTC Library materials that contain information about creating personal reading histories.

**Have Your Students Complete Online RA Reading Survey**

The Reading Apprenticeship Reading Survey is available at the drop down menu of any RTC computer. Call RTC Research Analyst Patricia Chakravarty at extension 2042 to ensure that your classroom report on the reading survey will be retrievable. Please note that a reading survey (your reading preferences) and a reading history (your personal history about your literacy developments) are not the same thing.

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