Reading in a Disciplinary Community

Faculty are very much in charge of fostering the classroom rituals and routines that support the teaching of literacy for their disciplines while building an academic and professional community of students.

We have all experienced disengaged students: those who do not read the text, explain away their lack of understanding, the comments that they can get the information elsewhere, and so on. How then do we get readers to come to their classrooms ready to read and be engaged in their learning process through their texts? You need to invest in some upfront and ongoing activities that build reader identity.

Who are the readers in your class? You can do this by asking the students to create a community norms document and complete a personal reading history and by sharing their personal reading histories with the class. These routines will give your insight into your students’ perceptions of themselves as readers and how they think of academics settings and texts.

First, faculty need to support whatever schema the student brings to the discipline. Students have some keen abilities that they can contribute to the analysis of text and text talk. We need to foster this attitude so that students continue to add to their schema building and assume a code breaking stance when reading presents even more challenges.

Faculty can ask:

- How did you discover that...?
- Please clarify that point...
- How did you make meaning of ...
- What made you think of that...
- Show me in the text where that idea comes from?
- That is helpful to know, where in the text did you learn this?

When faculty promote reading as an ongoing process of problem solving, students begin to realize that no one way of reading always works. They then assume different approaches or stances to tackling difficult texts. Difficulty may arise in the acronyms or jargon in a repair manual or by the complicated syntax in a technical textbook on radiology. As field experts, our faculty know how to navigate and cull the critical aspects out of the text. That is a perfect opportunity to think and share your thinking and know-how. By providing the discourse routines to support problem solving around text, faculty can instill new methods and attitudes about reading.
Simple ways to share building your classroom into a community of readers:

- Model as much as you can; be honest about the specific challenges you face in the text.
- Infuse the four dimensions of Reading Apprenticeship® into all reading tasks.
- Do Gallery Walks to gather insight into what your readers are thinking.
- Do collaborative Talking to the Text activities.
- Create classroom norms, then create and print a class mission statement on bookmarks to hand out.
- Videotape students doing a Read-X lecture on assigned text and post to a website for sharing.
- Create a Read-It Wall where students can post their own reading materials, articles, cartoons, book reviews, and other items that they are reading and thinking about.
- Choose a novel and run a book club type discussion for a topic related to your field. Once you have modeled the ways of running such a club and community and club protocols for readings and discussions, ask the students to take on this role.
- As you do Think Aloud and Talk to the Text routines, explain where you have struggled to make sense of the text.

Reading is a social activity; furthermore, reading requires complex thinking skills. If we apprentice students to notice their own thinking about text and the thinking of others, we can build a community of readers in our classrooms and across our campus.

For more information, including some ready-to-use templates, go to the RA/RATs LibGuide at http://libguides.rtc.edu/rats, click on the RA Routines & Topics tab and select the desired topic from the drop-down menu. Some possible topics include: Gallery Walk, Metacognition, Modeling, Personal Reading History, Schema, Talking to the Text and Think-Aloud.

Resources for Learning More about RA

- The RTC Library’s RA/RATs LibGuide will remain available indefinitely at http://libguides.rtc.edu/rats.
- The RATs website http://www.rtc-rats.org and its online files will available at least until 09/01/2013.
- Info about WestEd’s online RA course is available at http://www.wested.org/cs/ra/view/serv/158
- Feel free to email Michele Lesmeister (mlesmeister@rtc.edu) with questions about RA.