Extensive Academic Reading Promoted through Vertical Text Sets

Faculty in community colleges assign a lot of reading. This does not necessarily mean that the students actually do the reading. **Extensive reading** is another means for helping students do more reading, and it is through extensive reading that we help foster reader identity, development, and subject area expertise. Extensive academic reading needs to happen in the classroom where the modeling and scaffolds can be put in place to help build schema and skill.

You may ask how extensive reading helps our students. The students get hands-on practice in:

- Academic language and subject area knowledge as well as the texts structures of the disciplinary field
- Fluency, perseverance, and methods for engaging text that are apparent, intentional, and practiced
- Students built text-based, code-breaking stances and dispositions for subject-area learning
- Increased focus on reading disciplinary text that helps students gain strong field specific reader identities.

In addition to using the **Think Alouds**, **Talking to the Text**, **Gallery Walks**, **Reader Strategy Lists**, and **Reading/Evidence Logs** to model and prompt metacognitive conversations, faculty on our campus are using **Vertical Texts Sets**. Vertical text sets present the information to be learned in a range of skill levels.

A vertical text set can scaffold a reader to higher levels of reading and provide the time and practice to build the schema for the next more difficult text passage on the same topic. In this way, students build skills in mastering language, handling more challenging sentence length and complexity, engaging texts of conceptual difficulty, ways to approach idea density, and experience in judging relevance of information read.
An example of a Vertical Text Set is an article on a specific topic from the World Book Encyclopedia used in conjunction with an article on that same topic from the Encyclopedia Britannica’s Macropaedia. Both articles are on the same topic, but the World Book article will have less detail and will be easier to read and understand than the article in the Britannica. According to the World Book Encyclopedia website, its “articles are written at a level from one to four grades lower than other articles intended for the same age group.”

Looking at RTC Library’s online subscription databases, articles from SIRS Discoverer will be easier to read and understand than most articles from the ProQuest database. Articles from the online Grolier’s Multimedia Encyclopedia will be easier to read and understand than articles from the Encyclopedia Americana. Articles from CINAHL and Nursing Reference Center databases are geared to healthcare professionals and are harder to read and understand than articles from the GALE Encyclopedia of Medicine online database or the MedlinePlus.gov website which are geared to the general public. Some of the RTC Library’s online databases indicate the reading levels of the articles in them. You can also consult with the RTC librarians for suggestions on examples of Vertical Text Sets.

Here are the steps for using Vertical Text Sets:

a. Collect a set of texts (4 to 6 texts in sets) on a single topic from your text. Choose examples at different levels of difficulty and complexity.

b. Give the students time in class as a group to read and discuss the texts. Ask the students to read and discuss the following questions: In comparing the texts in the set, what makes the text difficult to understand and why? What are the specific text features that help or hinder their comprehension and engagement? Ask the students to document this on a poster. Then, ask the students to choose the text that they feel most at ease in reading and which one would be a stretch for them to comprehend.

c. Debrief as a whole class working from group to group talking about their text discoveries.

Interestingly, when students can explain the factors in text that contribute to the text’s difficulty or accessibility and establish strategies for moving vertically to a more challenging text, the instructor has helped the readers build skills that can be applied to other texts in the field.

For more information, 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, Readers Strategy Lists, Reading/Evidence Logs, 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.