Getting Started with RA

Reading Apprenticeship (RA) does not rely on any canned or purchased tools to promote reading skills. Instead, the curriculum routines stem from you, the course expert, and whatever learning materials are provided for the students including handouts, textbooks, software, and online resources.

Reading is a skill that we as instructors expect students to bring to each classroom, and we often assume that students are ready to read specific course content. As field experts, we know that this is not always the case.

With RA, the instructor models “how” to read the materials of the field, facilitates a collaborative discussion about the reading process, notes what is difficult about the field specific content, and how we each have our own ways of making meaning out of text.

This straightforward action-oriented approach to reading starts a metacognitive conversation about understanding what we are reading, why we read, and how we can improve our reading skills.

In a systematic regular way, we model, teach, and provide opportunities to inquire about the signposts of reading and the thinking necessary for field-specific type of texts by modeling our own reading processes and engaging that very text in order to make meaning.

The key to creating an atmosphere for Reading Apprenticeship lessons is to be keenly aware of how you as a field expert read. Work to develop an open classroom wherein all students can discuss how to make meaning from text, what aspects of the text are straightforward, and what are barriers to comprehension.

This will provide a sense of inclusion and increase accessibility to the classroom texts.

Some ideas of how to get started are:

- Check out Reading for Understanding by Ruth Schoenbach from the RTC Library (call number 428.40712 SCHÖNBAUER 1999) and read chapters 3-8. These chapters provide information on the cognitive tools for reading, building context, text, and disciplinary knowledge, and how to embed RA into the classroom.

- During the first week of class immerse the students in a discussion about their perceptions of reading for your field; have the students first make a list of their ideas for sharing in small group and to the class as a whole. Then you provide your expert knowledge by making a list of necessary reading skills. This will provide a scaffold from the student ideas and enhance their ideas with your input.

- Use the syllabus as a tool for discovery and discussion. Have the students scope it out; highlight key information; circle boilerplate which has little impact on their success; then have the students discuss the findings; ensure that you correct any misunderstanding of the details of the syllabus.

More ideas will be presented in a workshop presented by Michele Lesmeister at the Faculty In-Service on Sept. 15. Consider learning more about the potential of Reading Apprenticeship this academic year. You might find some amazing changes in your classroom.
Four Faculty Attend RA Seminar

Four RTC faculty members (Mike Biell, Glenda Hanson, Debbie Rundle, and Pam Williams-Butterfield) spent August 3–5 in Santa Ana, CA to attend WestEd’s Community College Seminar in Reading Apprenticeship. They learned about the RA instructional framework and practiced RA routines that engage students in metacognitive conversations to help improve reading comprehension. Achieving the Dream funded the training to help spread RA on campus and research the benefits of incorporating RA into program curricula.

Mike enjoyed the hands-on apprenticeship model of the training, sharing that he “really liked the fact that the strategies were not just explained, but we actually participated and practiced them. I gained much insight from those in my small group by interacting and role playing.” Debbie particularly liked the Think Aloud routine. “I felt uncomfortable at first with the concept, but I have already used this strategy several times... with my individual students and their parents.” Pam has already incorporated a Reading Log routine with her summer Nursing Assistant students, and her students seem equally excited. Pam reported that “One student replied she likes the reading log because it revealed how she is thinking about information so she can connect it to previous learning. Another student found the RA log a helpful learning tool to use ‘lifelong’.” Glenda exclaimed that “The training was sensational! We learned so much.”

For more info about the seminar, contact these faculty members and ask about their experiences.

RTC Library Item of the Month

The RTC Library has materials to support and help improve student reading and comprehension skills. For more info, contact the Library at 235-2331 or via email at librarian@RTC.edu.


RTC Library Call Number 428.40711 SMITH 2007

Website of the Month

http://tinyurl.com/mb4pnx

Chambersburg (PA) Area School District’s website about their district-wide Reading Apprenticeship initiative. Contains RA strategies, PowerPoint presentations and handouts.

RATs Calendar

Tues. Sept. 15, RTC Faculty In-Service: The RAT Pack will be conducting several workshops during the day.


Tues. Nov. 17, 2:45—3:45 PM in the Library Classroom C-204: RATs Workshop on RA Routines for Busy Faculty with Michele Lesmeister.

Tues. Dec. 8, 2:45—3:45 PM in the Library Classroom C-204: RATs Workshop with Debbie Crumb with topic to be announced later.

Join the RATs!

RATs (Reading Apprenticeship Teachers and supporters) is the RTC support group for those who want to use WestEd’s Reading Apprenticeship® (RA) to help engage students in a metacognitive conversation about their reading habits. Become a RAT and learn how to help improve your students’ reading skills and comprehension.

The RAT Pack is the training and planning leadership team to help get you started. Contact one of them today for more info about RA or RATs:

- Debbie Crumb
- Jenna Pollock
- Michele Lesmeister, Team Leader

For more info about RA at RTC, scurry over to our RATs website and blog!

http://rtc-rats.org/