Make Mine RA: Conversation and Comprehension Are an Integral Part of the Mix

Faculty members often tell us that they are trying new ways of teaching reading and helping students with content specific reading tasks. They are encouraged by what they see in their classrooms, and perhaps, more importantly, the students are grateful for the “help” in accessing their content in new and different ways.

RAT Pack leader Michele Lesmeister has been working in several classrooms where she is modeling for the faculty how to convert their textbook assignments into Reading Apprenticeship routines with rich metacognitive conversations about the reading texts and about how the students are engaging the text to make sense of some fairly complex content. These modeling sessions have instructors trying new ways of approaching reading.

The students repeatedly mention how nice it is to have someone help them make meaning from their texts. The students also note that the PowerPoint method of covering chapters is ineffective if they do not or cannot comprehend the passages in the text in the first place. Furthermore, they comment on how much they can learn in a short time with the Reading Apprenticeship routines.

One student told her classmates, “It doesn’t help to re-read a passage if I do not understand what I am reading in the first place. How does doing the same thing over and over suppose to improve reading ability if I do not get it?”

Applying the routines from Reading Apprenticeship help students break their reading tasks into manageable chunks and collaborate in making meaning. In turn, faculty are seeing firsthand how complex some of their assigned texts are, and the faculty members are also realizing why talking about their texts, their own reading processes, and how they think about the texts to make meaning is a worthwhile classroom endeavor.

Many faculty members have asked for some guidance about how to get started with Reading Apprenticeship. Our response is to first acknowledge that RA is a mindset and a framework of using reading routines which are based in four dimensions: personal, social, cognitive, and knowledge building. Together the four dimensions are worked by applying modeling, using reading routines, and scaffolding the reading skills to build endurance, knowing, and fluency.

To help faculty who have had some RA training, but desire some new ideas, please read the insert in this newsletter. This two-sided page shows some reading tasks and some ideas for developing them with some Reading Apprenticeship routines.

Michele is happy to work with faculty who want some assistance with reading in their classrooms for winter quarter. Please email her mlesmeister@rtc.edu and she will set up a meeting with you.

Look for Michele’s chart on pages 3-4 of this newsletter for ideas on how to create RA routines for your classroom.
RA Routines are Habits

The Rat Pack has some suggestions for students as they prepare for Winter Quarter:

- Learn the textbook’s organization.
- Begin to learn the vocabulary first.
- Write summaries of key passages.
- Read the passage out loud and “think aloud.” As you read out loud: Ask yourself, “Why is this important? Why is the author telling me this?”
- Annotate your textbook, marking the features that help you understand the content.
- Answer the questions at the end of the chapter and note the page where you found the answer.
- Have a jump start meeting: compare your chapter notes with those of a classmate. Discuss why you made the notes or annotations that you did.

Ask a RAT

Am I on the wrong mailing list? I am not a reading teacher.

True, you probably don’t have “reading” listed anywhere in your position title. But in order for your students to succeed, they NEED reading skills. And as instructors, we need to find ways to give our students the skills that they need.

Reading Apprenticeship (RA) is a perfect way to give students reading skills without adding to your already-stuffed curriculum. RA also doesn’t expect instructors to “teach reading” in a traditional sense. Reading Apprenticeship is focused on using classroom routines that allow students and teachers to make the invisible visible – starting conversations about the how and why of reading while tackling the materials you always cover in your course. It provides simple tools to foster these metacognitive conversations.

While the classroom teacher serves as an “expert reader”, teachers and students alike share their strengths and difficulties in reading. With supportive modeling, students take on an active role in reading and comprehending materials. Once routines become established, the teacher takes a backseat as students take charge of their reading and learning.

So, in a sense you’re right – you’re not a reading teacher. But you just might want to be a Reading Apprenticeship teacher.

Join the RATs!

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

For more info about RA at RTC, visit our RATs website and blog at http://rtc-rats.org Also visit our new RA/RATs LibGuide at http://libguides rtc edu/rats

Use It or Lose It!

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."
—Richard Steele

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
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<th>Creating a Reading Apprenticeship Routine</th>
<th>What makes the Routine a Reading Apprenticeship Approach?</th>
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<td>Highlighting a list of words.</td>
<td>The students will categorize the highlighted words and have the students discuss their groups and ways of categorization; then students report out their differences and discuss why their categorized the terms as they did.</td>
<td>Through discussing how they grouped words the students will share their reading and thinking processes based on their academic and personal experience.</td>
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<td>Locating and circling the prefixes, roots, and suffixes of words.</td>
<td>The students will group the word parts and use the context clues and their prior word knowledge to define the terms and extrapolate other like terms with the word parts.</td>
<td>Vocabulary must be taught to help increase fluency. When students are discussing and thinking about language patterns, it fosters metacognitive conversation.</td>
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<td>Reading to a peer or classmate.</td>
<td>The student reads a passage aloud to another classmate; then the classmates asks a series of questions based on what he or she heard the reader read. This often leads to the re-reading of the passage.</td>
<td>When students ask and discuss the passages, they interact with the text. Rereading is a well-documented method of improving oral reading fluency and it helps the students learn how the structures of text impact meaning.</td>
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<td>Reading a paragraph or portion of text out loud to the students.</td>
<td>The student or teacher will read the paragraph out loud, noting his or her thoughts as they relate to the text. Draft a Reader’s Strategy List (RSL) answering: What did you do to make sense of the text as you read?</td>
<td>This “thinking aloud” is a window into how the reader is engaging the text by showing what he/she is thinking. The RSL helps dispel the idea that one must read fast and shows the reading processes of peers.</td>
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<td>Marking or annotating a text.</td>
<td>Mark a text to locate confusions, mark the areas needing more explanation or discussions or to make a personal connection with the passage, mark the text to indicate how you are thinking and what connections you are making between that section and other sections of text—then hold a discussion of these annotations and dig into the annotations and compare annotations student to student.</td>
<td>The connections between and among annotations and the discussions about how the students marked and viewed the section of the text is what makes for a strong metacognitive conversation on the text. This type of activity focuses on the text but gets beyond the word by word translation of the text.</td>
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<td>Assigning the text or chapter as homework reading. Asking the students to be ready to discuss the content the following day in class.</td>
<td>Have the students write a memo to the instructor identifying sections of the text/chapter that they understood well and easily and identify at least one section that was challenging or presented a need for different reading strategies such as re-reading, word study, etc. This activity must become a routine and be practiced as such in order to get student buy-in. In addition, students can learn to measure their own reading progress with a weekly memo kept in a portfolio.</td>
<td>Assigning the text or chapter as homework reading is a way to help students build fluency in discipline specific texts that require silent and sustained reading to make meaning. Through the memo format the instructor learns about the reader’s strengths and challenges. This, in turn, builds a social and personal bond around reading and allows an instructor to learn firsthand the types of reading issues each student is having.</td>
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<td>Students read a text and answer reading questions about the text.</td>
<td>This common reading method/task can become an apprenticeship routine if the questions ask about how the student approached the reading task, score the reading for ease or difficulty on a scale of 1 to 10, and to list and discuss the features of the text that contribute to their scale score they make for the passage. Then the students will discuss their answers referring to the evidence for their answers in the text, noting the ease to locate their answers. For example, statistical data is easier to locate than evidence for an inference.</td>
<td>By asking the students to rank the text in terms of their ease and locate the text features that contribute to their scores begins a way to talk about obstacles to reading. The students will begin to read different texts with different reading skills.</td>
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