

Where's That in the Text? Sparking the Metacognitive Conversation:

Using Reading Apprenticeship to foster text-focused discussions in ELL reading courses

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Introduction

When I taught my first reading course, I was so excited to have my students spend time during class discussing a novel or short stories that were assigned reading. However, I quickly realized the challenges of classroom reading discussions. Students have a hard time connecting with the text, they don't use quotes to support their opinions or interpretations, and even having a conversation with their group mates becomes a struggle in and of itself.

How would you feel if I told you there were strategies you could use to address these issues and your students will start to enjoy talking about their reading? I know, you're skeptical, but it's true.

Background

In 2014, I attended a professional development workshop at Cascadia College, where I had just begun teaching in the English Language Program. This workshop caught my interest because it focused on teaching reading in different academic contexts; this was my first introduction to the Reading Apprenticeship (RA) framework, based on the book, *Reading for Understanding*, 2nd Edition, By Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, and Lynn Murphy. The framework consists of 4 different dimensions (personal, social, cognitive, and knowledge-building) that overlap using metacognitive conversation and extensive reading throughout.

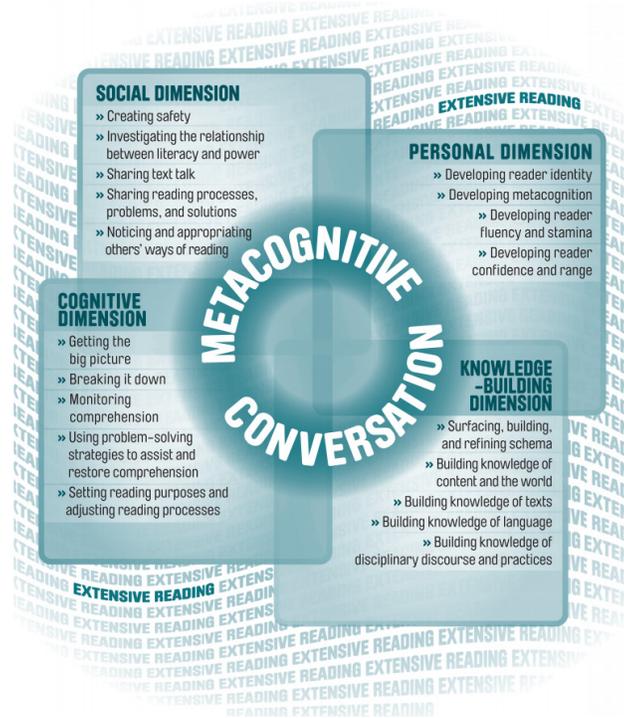


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The Reading Apprenticeship® Framework

These four overlapping and interacting dimensions of classroom life exist in a context of extensive reading and are linked by metacognitive conversation, both internal and external.



(Schoenbach, et. al., 2012, p. 25)

After attending that workshop, I was inspired to begin using RA techniques in my classes, specifically my Reading 6 course, which is the highest level in our 6-level intensive English program. Over the years, I have attended the regional RA conference, read the book extensively in a Faculty Learning Circle, and even presented on how I use these strategies. It has taken a lot of tweaking, testing, and improving, but I have finally found a structure that works best for my teaching style and my students.

Starting with the Social Dimension

Beginning on the first day of class, I strive to foster an environment where students feel comfortable and safe sharing their opinions, difficulties, and successes. To do this, I make sure that students all know each other's names and a little about each other by doing icebreaker activities. Some important Week 1 activities are:

Class Norms

I have students think about and discuss what characteristics or attributes make a 'good' or 'bad' class for them. We use these discussions to make a list of class norms - what is expected of the students and teacher for this specific class. I use the student's own words when writing the list, and we return to the list throughout the quarter to self-assess how we're doing and add or edit norms as needed.

Personal Reading History

As their first homework assignment, students are given a handout with questions about their experience reading in their first language. Questions ask about their feelings towards reading, who helped or supported their literacy, and who or what discouraged it. Students discuss their personal reading histories in class, which allows them to see that each person has an individual reader identity.

Book Club Groups

During the first week of class, I put students into groups or teams, which I call Book Club Groups. They get to know each other through icebreaker activities and sharing their Personal Reading History. Then, they have to create a team name and logo that represents them. I encourage the students to be creative and have fun with this new identity. The Book Club Group is their discussion group in which they will discuss the supplemental novel or short stories for the quarter.

Supporting the Cognitive & Knowledge-Building Dimensions

Reading Strategies

As a reading teacher, my focus has shifted from teaching students content to teaching them skills they can use to learn in any context - active reading strategies. This is a hard concept for students to discuss at first, but when I key them in to the concept that there are specific strategies that they can use when encountering a new or difficult text, they take ownership of it and develop confidence as readers. This could be the simple statement of how you find more information about a picture by reading the caption, or how you read the title and think of what you already know about the topic.

In my classroom, I ask students to make a list of the strategies they use before, during, and after reading. We make a list

together as a class, and they are usually very short at first. However, as students move through the class, their list of strategies grows longer, leading to students in higher levels being better prepared to encounter difficult texts.

Importance of Modeling

This focus on active reading strategies has also made me more cognizant of the importance of modeling. When we talk about the strategies we use, we need to model this for our students. Much of what we do in my classroom is walking step-by-step through the reading process for each new article and discussing each strategy that is used. Making this normally invisible process visible helps students adopt new strategies and ways of thinking about reading.

Capturing Thinking

The best part, in my opinion, about RA is that ability to make invisible processes visible through metacognition. Since I first began using RA in my classes, I have asked students to complete a metacognitive log, in which they collect evidence from the text they're reading and capture their thoughts, feelings, or reactions to the text. In my course, students have to select quotes that represent the depth and breadth of the reading and write responses that are thoughtful and clearly connected to the text. This allows them to look back and see their own thoughts from when they were actively engaged with the reading; it also prepares them to have an active, text-focused discussion.

Bringing the Personal Dimension to the Table

Completing a metacognitive log allows students to capture their thinking, develop their reader identity, and build confidence. Students in my classes complete their logs as homework while reading the novel or assigned short story, then bring it to class for their discussion with their Book Club Group.

Book Club Meetings

These group discussions are structured, where each student has a specific, assigned role that they must complete. Roles rotate each week, meaning that they perform a different role each time they meet with their group. An example handout with descriptions of each student role is included in Appendix 1.

Students meet with their Book Club Group once per week, usually the first class day of the week. In their meetings, they

References

Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C. & Murphy, L. (2012). *Reading for Understanding: How reading apprenticeship improves disciplinary learning in secondary and college classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

are required to share from their evidence logs and answer discussion questions provided by me. At the beginning of the term, it requires more set up and facilitation on the instructor's part. However, over the course of the term, it becomes a routine that students easily follow in their discussions. The result is an active, thoughtful, meaningful, and text-focused discussion that requires little work on the instructor's part.

Final Thoughts

While the thoughtful and active discussions described above may seem too good to be true, it can really happen in the classroom with integration of the RA framework and clearly defined procedures and roles. It has been a long time coming, but my reading courses now follow this set pattern and lead to rich and meaningful discussions around reading, which lead students to become confident and engaged learners. The RA framework and specific strategies or activities discussed above can be adapted and applied to any number of classes; I hope you'll give them a try!

For materials to try in your class, see [Appendix 1](#).

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