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Research Matters

Reading Apprenticeships

It is 9:33 a.m., second period at this high school. In Senior English, students are midway through a unit on war and literature, and on this day Mr. Diamond passes out a copy of e.e. cummings' poem, "what if a much of a which of a wind." He reads aloud the first stanza. He asks other students to read aloud the next two stanzas, and then he asks, "What is this poem about?" Students squirm, stare, say nothing. Mr. Diamond drops clues, waits, drops more clues, eventually telling the class what *he* thinks the poem is about.

In the next corridor, Ms. Lewis directs the sophomores in Biology to open their texts to Chapter 12 and read the two-page section on the circulatory system. Students read silently while Ms. Lewis sits at her desk and enters absences into the computer. Ten minutes later, she asks for volunteers to explain the function of the circulatory system. One student hesitantly raises her hand to answer the question. Ms. Lewis waits, scans the classroom for more hands. None go up. Frustrated by the lack of student response, she summarizes for the class the reading on the circulatory system.

Meanwhile, down the hall in American History II, Ms. Brown-

well conducts a recitation, asking students factual recall questions about their twenty-minute independent reading on the Battle of

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Gettysburg. When no one can explain the decisiveness of the Battle of Gettysburg in the war effort, Ms. Brownwell looks at her wristwatch, lets out a deep, barely audible sigh, and asks a student to read aloud the second paragraph, where the word *decisive* appears in bold.

We have all seen these familiar classroom scenarios—teachers assign reading in texts, students read, and then something follows, generally a recitation, a quiz to check comprehension, or a discussion. Presuming students have read and understood at least some of the text, teachers check for understanding. Too often, students sit quietly, knowing that if they wait long enough their teachers will interpret or summarize the texts for them. In each classroom, teachers try desperately to engage students but then give up, rush in with the "content" to cover, and then "move on."

My experience as a teacher and as a school visitor to many class-

rooms tells me that the "assign-read-check for understanding" pedagogy is prevalent, and that is worrisome. I fear that after a certain age (say, 9 or 10) or stage of their education (say, sixth grade) students no longer receive continuous instruction in reading, except in designated reading classes (e.g., remedial reading), where they are expected to export their learning to content-area classes.

In secondary schools, I hear content-area teachers say, "I'm a science teacher, not a reading teacher" or "Why don't they teach these kids to read in (elementary school) or (middle school)?" or "I have to cover the curriculum; there's just no time to focus on how to read the textbook." All legitimate concerns, all complex issues, none with easy resolutions.

But the problem is that, as students move through their schooling, their reading changes: The texts differ in conceptual density and in readability, the prior knowledge they need to bring to texts becomes more specialized, the disciplines themselves call for different ways of reading, and the need for new or more productive strategies for understanding texts becomes vital. When we consider these reasons that teachers think they should not be teaching reading in their academic areas, and when we consider these new reading chal-

allenges for students, we are forced to ask, *Where do* students learn to continue to develop as readers? *Where do* they receive direct instruction in reading?

Reading Apprenticeships

Reading apprenticeships address this problem directly. In reading apprenticeships, teachers model their own reading processes with students, making visible the otherwise private aspects of reading, sharing aloud the ways *they* strive to make meaning, and demonstrating successful strategies for understanding academic texts.

In Reading Apprenticeship classrooms, teachers reconceptualize subject-area learning as an apprenticeship in discipline-based practices of thinking, talking, reading and writing. In a Reading Apprenticeship classroom, then, the curriculum includes more than just *what we read*. It includes *how we read* and *why we read in the ways we do*.

Reading apprenticeships demand that “the invisible processes involved in comprehending [academic] texts must be made visible” (Schoenbach et al., “Apprenticing” 134; italics in original).

Reading for Understanding lays out the most comprehensive description of the reading apprenticeship approach. Abridged accounts have appeared in *Harvard Educational Review*, NCTE’s *Voices from the Middle* and, most recently, in *Phi Delta Kappan*. In the San Francisco Bay area,

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reading apprenticeships have been in schools since the mid-’90s when the Strategic Literacy Initiative at

WestEd began working with multidisciplinary middle school and high school teachers to implement the apprenticeship framework. Envisioned as an alternative to remedial reading instruction for academically underperforming students, the reading apprenticeships approach was initially implemented in an academic course and subsequently in English, social studies, math, and science classes. Students exposed to reading apprenticeships have made positive gains in reading development. Details on achievement from reading apprenticeship programs may be found on the WestEd Web site (<http://www.wested.org/stratlit>). Along with showing gains on assessments, many reading apprenticeship students change their conception of what it means to *read*:

In the beginning of the year, most students responded that to be a good reader, a person must know a lot of words, pronounce them correctly, and read fast and fluently aloud. By year’s end, they increasingly saw that good readers also are mentally active, making sense of what they read and using strategies to monitor and control their reading. (Greenleaf et al. 114)

Reading apprenticeships help students become stronger, more confident readers by

- > engaging students in more reading;
- > making the teacher’s discipline-based reading processes and knowledge visible to students;
- > making the students’ reading processes, knowledge, and understandings visible to the teacher and to one another;
- > helping students gain insight into their own reading processes as a means of gaining

strategic control over these processes; and

- > helping students acquire a repertoire of problem-solving strategies for deepening comprehension of texts in various academic disciplines. (Schoenbach et al., “Apprenticing” 134)

Reading apprenticeships can work in any academic area, as long as teachers are willing to reflect on their own processes for reading and share those processes with students through such familiar techniques as think-alouds:

One eleventh-grade English teacher introduces the kind of problem-solving strategies needed to make sense of a difficult literary text by reading aloud the first paragraph of “Wash,” a short story by William Faulkner. As he reads, he also thinks aloud about the text. Students are asked to categorize his think-alouds into five types of mental moves: picturing, questioning, summarizing, recalling, and clarifying. Similarly, a chemistry teacher thinks aloud as she demonstrates a laboratory procedure in front of her class, following instructions, making observations and careful descriptions, and drawing conclusions. These teachers draw students into the activity of consciously puzzling through texts and classroom activities. They begin the apprenticeship process by making thinking visible—and by making the confusions, false starts, and retracings that characterize reading for understanding an accepted part of classroom life. (Schoenbach et al., *Reading* 123)

In reading apprenticeship classrooms, teachers scaffold students’ reading development in the same ways that mentors outside school scaffold their apprentices’ learning—they acknowledge challenges,

demystify processes, model ways of overcoming difficulties, coach their apprentices through strategic activities, and support the pulls and tugs of growth. We need only think about how we ourselves learned to ski, sew, cook, play piano, do woodwork, and so forth, to know the learning power of apprenticeships. When I was young, my father often took me through the analytical steps of repairing home appliances: We sat side by side at his workbench as he talked through the investigative process of figuring out why my mother's mixer just up and quit; he turned the mixer over in his hands, peeking here and there, noticing carefully; and then he talked me through (a think-aloud) the tedious steps of how to distinguish between electrical and mechanical malfunctions as he—and then I—loosened and tightened screws, checked wires, and shot some WD-40 here and there. I learned how to diagnose appliance malfunctions, and I learned how to “read” small appliances.

Four Interacting Dimensions of Classroom Life

Reading apprenticeship classrooms have four interrelated dimensions that support students' reading. In the **social dimension**, students and teachers interact freely in discussing text challenges and reading processes, sharing confusions and problems with understanding and an “It's all right to be confused” ethos. Safety is key in this dimension—safety to discuss reading processes, problems, and solutions; safety around issues of literacy and power; and safety when revealing feelings about difficult texts. Classroom activities may include talk about discussion-safety norms, examination of the relationships

between literacy and political power, the affective aspects of reading aloud in class, and experiments with strategies different readers use to understand texts.

In the **personal dimension**,

[c]lassroom activities support individual students in developing increased awareness of themselves as readers, inviting them to discover and refine their own goals and motivations, likes and dislikes, and hopes and potential growth in relationship to reading. (Schoenbach et al., *Reading* 27)

Here the focus is on how *individual* students engage in reading, and it may include such activities as writing and talking about previous experiences with reading, setting goals for personal reading development, becoming aware of attention lapses during reading, and persisting with reading a difficult or boring text. In the personal dimension, students and teachers work together to create awareness of each student's reading processes.

The **cognitive dimension**

involves developing students' repertoire of specific comprehension and problem-solving strategies, with an emphasis on group discussion of when and why particular cognitive strategies are useful. (Schoenbach et al., “Apprenticing” 135)

By focusing on cognitive strategies for making sense of texts, students learn about and try out the successful strategies good readers rely on when they read. When strategies are deliberately integrated into learning the content of specific disciplines (e.g., science or English), students know firsthand how successful the techniques can be in that particular domain. This is much different from a pull-out class in reading strategies, where typically students learn “a disembodied set of

cognitive strategies—separate from the texts that necessitate their use and without the support students need to make use of these strategies on their own” (Schoenbach et al., *Reading* 31). It is a democratic recognition that everyone, including teachers, is a developing reader.

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In the cognitive dimension, students may learn strategies for getting the big picture (e.g., scanning), breaking down large chunks of text into manageable pieces (e.g., periodic summarizing), monitoring comprehension (e.g., visualizing), bolstering comprehension (e.g., drawing or sketching concepts), and adjusting reading processes (e.g., slowing down and speeding up).

Finally, in the **knowledge-building dimension**, students develop their understanding of texts *as texts*—that is, they learn how texts construct and present information through such elements as the visual rhetoric of the page (space, headers, bullets), logical cue words (transitions, anticipators, summarizers), and the different ways texts organize and present information in different disciplines. Thus, for example, students in English classes may learn story grammars (e.g., “somebody wanted something, but . . . and so . . .”) in order to track the development of conflict in a story. In social studies, they may learn to notice the process words that signal the sequential causes of a historical event. Or in science they may examine the structural markers (headings, subheadings, typography) in a science text that signal the functional na-

ture of a physiological system, such as circulation.

The four dimensions mutually reinforce one another in reading apprenticeship classrooms. As teachers orchestrate and integrate this framework, reading becomes a demystified process, and the act of reading, especially reading difficult texts, becomes humanized. Further, when teachers and students form a community of developing readers, each making visible how they read and why they read, reading instruction becomes a naturally integrated part of the curriculum. Subject-area teachers become, by default, reading teachers, in two ways. One, they *inadvertently* teach reading simply by making their own reading processes visible through demonstration teaching—saying, for example,

Here is a really hard text I have to read for my graduate class, but now I'm going to talk out loud while I read it to show you how I try to make sense of it. Then, I'm going to read the first paragraph of our text out loud and use the same techniques I use on my graduate course book. Can you listen for any parallels and then let me know what you notice?

Or teachers may *advertently* teach reading by deliberately presenting known strategies and showing students how to use them, such as K-W-Ls (Ogle) and anticipation guides (Readence, Bean, and Baldwin 206–08). They may model such strategies with their students, provide written and graphic instructions about these strategies and the time to practice them, and then help students use these strategies while reading.

Implications for Classrooms

Many implications for classrooms stem from one's decision to imple-

ment reading apprenticeships. The most important—and global—one is what these researchers and teachers call putting into place the *metacognitive conversation*, whereby

teacher[s] and students discuss their personal relationships to reading in the discipline, the cognitive strategies they use to solve comprehension problems, the structure and language of particular types of texts, and the kinds of knowledge required to make sense of reading materials. (Schoenbach et al., "Apprenticing" 136)

This conversation takes place over time and with many texts and, during it, teachers and students demystify reading. For example, one social studies teacher invited her students to supply texts for her to do think-alouds in class:

My students were completely amazed that I, as a mature, adult reader, would find some texts challenging. They delighted in watching me struggle to understand the texts they brought me, recognizing the feeling of being lost, but surprised by my patience and tenacity, by my vigorous search for handholds and willingness to stretch for any shred of meaning. Many found strategies like using the pictures, slowing down, breaking it into chunks, using my knowledge of Spanish, thinking about what the root of a word might mean, wondering about meanings in new contexts, flat-out guessing, etc., to be a complete revelation. (Schoenbach et al., "Apprenticing" 136)

When teachers demystify reading in ways such as these, they show students that becoming a better reader is a matter of strategy, not a matter of intelligence or a gift; that hard work pays off; and that when one strategy fails, another is always available.

Routine would be another teaching implication. When classroom cultures have reading fully integrated into the fabric of daily life, a

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normal course of events would be to routinely address reading processes and strategies. Thus, lesson planning would include attention to reading apprenticeship practices. The researchers recognize that

supporting students' disciplinary reading does take time, particularly if teachers focus on helping their students learn *how* to grapple with texts to gain understanding.

It is, however, "time well spent" because

when [teachers] slow reading down at strategic times to model productive comprehension processes, their students gradually develop the capacity to read longer, even more challenging texts more independently and with greater understanding. (Schoenbach et al., "Apprenticing" 137; italics in original)

As students become more capable readers of challenging texts, the time teachers would ordinarily spend summarizing and reviewing textual material is reduced. By establishing reading routines to cover content, students engage in learning subjects while developing as readers, the one reinforcing the other.

Because reading apprenticeships provide students with the tools to become better readers, they provide *access* to disciplinary discourse: "The primary goal of Reading Apprenticeship is to increase academic

opportunities for adolescents who do not see themselves as readers of rigorous texts,” such access becoming “a vital means of working toward equity in academic achievement in secondary school and beyond” (Schoenbach et al., “Apprenticing” 137). One can sense the ethical question here: Are we contributing to the denial of academic access by not supporting readers in the content areas? If we consider the real academic consequences that befall those academically underperforming students who fail to gain access to texts (low grades, impacted SAT scores, denied college admissions), we may well see an obligation to help them become stronger readers of rigorous texts.

Finally, teachers who become reflective about how *they* read and how *they* approach difficult texts appreciate the struggles their students face in the same endeavors. They begin to understand the cognitive complexity of reading processes:

When these teachers have opportunities to explore their own reading processes, to discover and articulate the resources and strategic mental habits they bring to reading, to

share their reading processes . . . they build richer, more complex conceptions of reading.

They also come to a deeper understanding of the affective consequences of situation-specific reading difficulties (e.g., loss of confidence as a poetry reader), “locating the problem of student reading in the complexity of reading itself” (Greenleaf et al. 116).

To return, then, to the classrooms profiled at the beginning of this column, what might these teachers do, other than assign the reading and check for comprehension? From a reading apprenticeship framework, Mr. Diamond could do a think-aloud on the first stanza of the Cummings poem, talking about how *his* understanding of the *possible* meaning of the poem is tentatively building and then inviting students to do the same for the second and third stanzas as the entire class openly constructs meaning, safely. Ms. Lewis might preview the textual clues in the chapter on circulation, commenting on how those clues help her to see how the text is organized. Ms. Brownwell might preview the Gettysburg read-

ing by showing how she notices the cause-effect relationship words in the text, such as how X *led to* Y, or how A, B, and C *caused* D, and how those words can help readers see a chronology of related events unfolding in time.

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