

CHABOT COLLEGE BASIC SKILLS INITIATIVE

Focused Inquiry Group (FIG) to Investigate Core Issues and Practices in Basic Skills Education

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What is the problem at the heart of your investigation?

With 70% of entering students testing below college level reading and/or writing, and only “one-quarter of students initially enrolling in a reading fundamentals course in community college ever enroll[ing] in a transfer-level English class...” (Moore and Shulock,12), a disproportionate number of students are not making it through the benchmark courses to degree, certificate, or transfer. While these students may not make it through the English sequence, nor the Career and Technical Education courses, they are also not succeeding in the other college-level courses they are taking across disciplines: “There is, in fact, widespread concern that these students’ limitations in basic academic skills contribute to high attrition rates in courses throughout the curriculum and to increasing pressures on faculty throughout the college to lower standards in order to help struggling students move on” (Bueschel, 5). Yet, it’s not only instructors who feel challenged by the skills students present with and the requirements of their courses. Students who aren’t equipped to manage course requirements and aren’t given instruction or guidance around the assigned reading identify that their “...sense of self, sense of future possibility, is very tied up with their facility as readers...” (McFarland, et al, 2007).

The Reading Apprenticeship model provides a framework for “mak[ing] learning and the learning process more visible to teachers and students alike” (Bueschel, 7). It has been identified as an effective practice in approaching reading instruction in both reading and composition courses and disciplined-based classrooms. In our ongoing work this year, our inquiry questions are falling into two categories:

1) For Students: What are effects of Reading Apprenticeship on...

- parity in student outcomes
- retention
- engagement in the work of class
- student sense of self-efficacy
- performance on key assessments
- students’ abilities to question

2) For Instructors: How important is reading in the context of the college?

- Why do we assign reading?
- How do we expect our students to use their reading?
- How would we like student to use their reading?
- How should we teach reading to better match our objectives?

How have you arrived at these questions?

The notion that the number of students coming into our college needing basic skills instruction in reading and writing is evidenced in the increasing enrollment in these courses. The subsequent notion that students persist and succeed in college-level courses at a higher rate if those students have passed English 1A is also evidenced in our institutional research. The hypothesis that implementing RA instruction across campus will help contribute to an increasing proportion of basic skills students persisting toward success in transfer-level courses is our proposition, which is highly encouraged in the literature from the Center for Student Success, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Strategic Literacy Initiative.

In Fall 2008, our FIG's five participants had attended the Summer Leadership Institute in Reading Apprenticeship. In January 2009, our FIG expanded to nine members and all nine of us attended the Winter Conference in Reading Apprenticeship. Additionally, Cindy Hicks is participating in the Community Colleges Literacy Research Group, which researches the use of RA practices in colleges across the country. Likewise, throughout both the Fall and Spring semesters, the Strategic Literacy Initiative has been partnering with our FIG as an incubator to research application of RA in the community college.

What are your plans for investigating these issues?

In trying to capture evidence from our inquiry project, we have the shared goal of making visible what we learn. We have established four types of data collection:

- 1) Institutional Research: How do students persist and succeed in basic skills and college-level courses which implement RA strategies as compared to similar courses that don't? Included in this research will be a comparison of new results to our own past student data, in an effort to capture a range of time within our own classrooms. Are there changes in the number of weeks students maintain active attendance? Are there changes in demographics of students who persist? Are there trends which suggest students trained in RA do better in other classes which require reading, or in the next sequenced class within a particular discipline?

Updates: We are currently evaluating classroom data from 2003-2008, for classes taught by Cindy Hicks, Alisa Klevens, Katie Hern, and Wanda Wong (English 101A, English 101B, English 102, and Business 1). We are looking at changes in student success, retention, and withdrawal within our own classes over time and in comparison to overall success, retention, and withdrawal rates. We are looking for changes directly tied to the inclusion of RA practices. In the next few weeks, we will also be receiving data on student persistence rates. Do our students who

take classes informed by RA practices persist through the course sequence at a higher rate than the average?

- 2) Surveys and Student Interviews: Does RA impact students' affective behaviors and experiences in class? Do students' attitudes toward reading change? Do students' attitudes toward the class change? Do students feel differently about their abilities to succeed in college? Use of Classroom Assessment Techniques, the self-efficacy survey (Cabrillo College has a model), and the development of a questionnaire that can be used across disciplines (following Patricia Wu's "Science Reading Questionnaire" as our model).

Updates: Students across our classes were given pre and post reading surveys. In one of our classes, students utilized their reading survey to find two books to read on their own outside of class. In the two English classes where students practiced extensive reading (independent reading), students noted changes in their reading behavior and interest to continue to "read on their own." Students in one of our English 101B classes were videotaped and their interview responses indicate a positive change in their reading confidence and a belief in their ability to understand complex reading material. Likewise, these students expressed confidence in transferring these skills to other courses.

In Spring 09, Patricia Wu is piloting her Science Reading Questionnaire and we're using Survey Monkey to evaluate the results. Likewise, our FIG is using the MARS (Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies Inventory) to assess our students in their global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies. We will use these assessments to pinpoint areas to work on in our instruction of reading.

- 3) Pre-Post Assessments: Use of an intake and exit Curriculum Based Reading Assessment Test to notice changes in reading behavior from beginning, to developing, to internalizing, to mastery.

Updates: Two of our FIG members utilized CERA in Fall 08, but were dissatisfied with the results it produced. We felt that in following the CERA guidelines, the reading to be evaluated was not difficult enough to require students engaging with the texts and that the questions could be adequately answered without revealing much about a student's strengths or weaknesses as a reader. This was a good reminder that the CERA document needs reflect the difficulty level of our regular course material.

- 4) Common Evaluation Across Classes: Collecting samples of "Talking to the Text" over the course of the semester to see changes in students "working the reading." Evaluating student progress in engaging with the reading, problem solving, and arriving at conclusions. Collecting audio and/or visual recording of students "working the reading" in small groups. How well are students able to

ask questions, answer those questions, form and prove conclusions, make connections, and synthesize material?

Updates: As a group, we've collected samples of Talking to the Text, Reading Tests, audio and visual recordings of students "working the reading." We've noted patterns of change in how students mark their texts as they read and ask/answer their own questions. The audio recordings were very distorted and difficult to analyze; however, we will be continuing to take video recordings of RA instruction.

It is also our intention to participate in a learning commons through the Center for Teaching and Learning website. Our RA FIG has posted all of our meeting notes from Fall 08, minutes, and agenda, along with other useful links as a way to "get the word out" on what our FIG is working on, to elicit new interest in faculty participation, and to keep track of the progress we are making as a FIG. Our FIG recruited four new faculty across the disciplines to participate in Spring 09. As our FIG has expanded, we will be mentoring each other in RA by participating in classroom and/or workshop observations.

Likewise, as part of our project timeline, we will be making a presentation of our work at Convocation 2009. We also hope to start an RA Newsletter (possibly a series of 6 brochures highlighting RA techniques along with student voices), to be disseminated campus-wide.

Additionally, the RA FIG will be contributing to campus-wide support through the creation and implementation of Tutoring 49C, a "Metacognitive Framework for Learning" tutorial for all tutors and faculty tutor coordinators within the Learning Connection. This course is currently in the planning stages and the projected start date is Fall 2009. The first draft of the course outline has been evaluated by the Fall 08 FIG. Currently, the WRAC tutors have received some RA training through their 49B Content-Area class taught by Alisa Klevens. The WRAC Center is planning on piloting more reading and writing support across the curriculum through a partnered BSI Grant with the History Department.

Who will be involved?

Currently, our members include: Patricia Wu, Science Faculty; Wanda Wong, Accounting and Computer Science Faculty; Cindy Hicks, English Faculty and Learning Connection Coordinator; Katie Hern, English Faculty and Basic Skills Committee Co-Chair; Alisa Klevens, English Faculty and WRAC Coordinator; Nicholas Alexander, Science Faculty; Ming Ho, Math Faculty and President of the Faculty Senate; Kent Uchiyama, ESL Faculty and ESL Tutor Coordinator; and Jane Wolford, History Faculty. Each member of our group has been trained in Reading Apprenticeship through the West-Ed Winter Conference in Reading Apprenticeship. The four new members of our group will attend the Summer LIRA in 09.

Integral to the success of our FIG is having a diverse faculty from across the curriculum. As expert readers in their disciplines, Patricia, Wanda, Ming, Jane, Kent, and Nick have particular insight into how a scientist, accountant, mathematician, historian, or a second-language learner reads. Their expertise makes them the best practitioner to apprentice students on reading and then those students can apprentice other students. One of the intended goals of our FIG is to share best practices between our disciplines to serve our shared students. Our FIG allows for coordination across the disciplines to include reading instruction that fits our classrooms' particular learning objectives and to move reading from the halls of English to the halls of every subject area.

The expansion of our FIG to math, history, ESL, and biology has been very exciting. We've started this new semester together evaluating our own reading processes. As a group, we've shared texts and how we, as "novice readers" approach these texts. In turn, the "expert" reader has illuminated his/her approach to the reading and helped us uncover the disciplinary knowledge required to successfully decoding the material. These sharing exercises have been eye-opening in unmasking how our students may feel when we assign material unfamiliar to them. This particular exercise has tapped into the affective response toward reading – both positive and negative. As a result of this exercise, we are learning to be transparent about our reading processes to our students to help them navigate the texts in the most productive, efficient way possible. In addition, this semester, Jane Wolford is running a history workshop, funded through the BSI Grant, where she utilizes Reading Apprenticeship techniques to assist her students in understanding the reading in her Women's History class. She has approximately 25 students regularly attending these weekly sessions and she has shared positive results – both in student performance on examinations and in the social dimension of classroom instruction. We will be visiting her workshops and taking video recording to capture her students' reading processes.

As the 08-09 FIG leader, Alisa Klevens set the meeting agendas, facilitated the meetings and took minutes, reported to the Basic Skills Committee, posted work to the Center for Teaching and Learning website, coordinated with the Strategic Literacy Initiative, organized conference attendance, applied for funding, and participated in recruitment of new faculty. She will also produce a year-end report on the Reading Apprenticeship FIG for 08-09 and will help coordinate the workshop for Convocation 09. The 09-10 FIG leader will continue these tasks.

How do you intend to organize the inquiry project, and what do you think it will cost?

Our FIG meets twice a month for two hours each meeting. The FIG leader sets the agenda, but all FIG participants come prepared to share out classroom practices. Our FIG has a proposed timeline of how to organize our work.

Fall 2008: refine the data we'll gather, share emerging results, interpret data together, discuss implementation, work on RA tutor training curriculum, and bring in new faculty from non-English disciplines to attend LIRA Winter Conference.

Spring 2009: RA FIG expands to 8 members, with prior FIG members serving as mentors to new faculty, 1st FIG participates in analysis of data to present our findings in a teaching commons, new RA FIG designs their own inquiry plan and begins implementation, refine tutor training program to launch in fall, identify summer LIRA faculty, prepare workshop for Fall 09 Convocation.

Updates: We are currently on track with this timeline, with the exception that we now have 9 members instead of 8.

Summer 2009: 4 new faculty go to summer LIRA

Fall 2009: Convocation workshop where we introduce RA and share our results, rolling out our teaching commons representations, implement new tutor training course in RA, design an inquiry plan to assess impact of RA on tutors, students, and faculty

Winter 2009: Expand RA training to new interested faculty to attend LIRA Winter Conference. Join inquiry group (mentored by fall 08 participants) as they implement in Spring 2010.

Summer 2010: 3 new faculty go to summer LIRA.

Fall 2010: Professional development in RA is under the purview of the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Projected costs:

2009-2010 1 FIG Coordinator 3 CAH -- \$5,500

2009-2010 8 FIG Participants -- \$750 stipend/each

Total FIG Expenditure for 2009-2010: \$11,500

Total FIG Expenditure for 2008-2009: \$8,500

The increase in FIG expenditure reflects that the size of our FIG has doubled. We have 9 total members, up from five.

Professional Development

As a part of bringing RA to the college, we will actively recruit classroom faculty from a range of disciplines to participate in RA training and inquiry.

3 faculty guests for RA Winter Conference for January 2010 -- \$400/each

3 faculty participants in the Summer Reading Apprenticeship Workshop June 2010 -- \$1200/each

Total Professional Development Expenditure for 2009-2010: \$4,800

Total Professional Development Expenditure for 2008-2009: \$8,200

The decrease in professional development funds for next year reflects that our current 9 members have already received funding for training, and we plan to expand only by 3 members for next year.

References

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