

AV Reading

When we initiate an intervention for a student, we must begin with two questions: first, what can they do presently, and second, what do they need help on? Too often we ask the second without regard to the first.

Reading News:

--Join the Literacy Planning Committee: Wednesday, October 5th, 2:30-3:00 in Room 132.

--MRA Winter Symposium: The Minnesota Reading Association will be hosting an event on Native American / American Indian perspectives and resources. The new English Language Arts Standards require English classes to use texts by Minnesota American Indians. Find out more about the symposium at mnreading.org.

--*Guantanamo Boy*: Check out the new Young Adult novel that describes life at Guantanamo Bay through the eyes of a 15 year old who gets caught up in counter-terrorism operation and falsely accused of being an extremist.

Scott Voss (651)683-6969 #93368
Reading Coordinator AVHS

Doing Your Homework on Homework

Before we develop plans to improve student completion rates and performance on homework, we have to begin with a few important questions about why the problem exists. This is necessary to avoid discarding students as simply lazy or apathetic, when that may not be the case. Surveying students and talking to them is an important step in this process. This month I will offer some tips on how to do that and what you can do with that information.

Although it isn't completely reliable, surveying students gives us some important information about what is—or is not—happening with homework. Last month, on one reading assignment, I created a quiz that I gave to the students following their assigned work. At the bottom, I simply asked, "Did you read this assigned reading? (Yes / No). And if not, what prevented you from doing so?" I told them that their honesty would be rewarded and that if they had not read it, I would allow for them to make-up the work at a later time. Unfortunately, my completion rate was pretty low. Only 28% of the students admitted to reading the chapter. Though I was disappointed by their performance, I was intrigued

by their reasons for not completing the assignment. Thirty-five percent indicated that they had other commitments that kept them from doing their work, 21% mentioned that homework in other classes kept them from doing it and another 21% simply forgot. Only two students felt it was too hard to read.

This tells me that, in general, the assignment did not appear to be too difficult. For the vast majority of students, they could do the work but either were overly busy or overly disorganized. So my approach on the next assignment would focus on solutions that would address these factors.

It should be noted that self-reported surveys are not always completely accurate. First, sometimes students answer with the a socially acceptable response versus an honest one. Second, students are not always in the position to provide an objective or reliable response. This becomes especially noticeable when we ask them about their performance in relation to their ability. For example, students tend to overstate their abilities even when there is evidence to suggest the opposite. And while they might actually struggle with the

reading or assignment, they might simply offer other excuses for not doing it, since they do not want to appear incapable.

In the end, it is necessary to draw information from numerous sources before we make decisions about what to do next. One easy “Homework Survey” is available on line. (You can find that survey by Googling “Homework survey for students (short version)©Cathy Vatterott”.) Items on the survey make broad claims, which reduces the power of the findings, but can still give you some useful information for your class as a whole. Regardless of how you collect the information, please feel free to stop by and share it with me at some point.

Building Community in Class with “Whip Arounds”

In Bonnie Davis’ *How to Teach Students Who Don’t Look Like Me*, she refers to the importance of building a sense of community within the classroom. Perhaps the first step in creating a culturally relevant classroom is establishing a space where students feel comfortable sharing something about themselves. One of the exercises she offers is the “Whip Around.” In this activity, completed in the opening minutes of the class, the teacher poses a simple question, and then each student is given the chance to respond. They can either answer the question or “pass.”

The process can be completed in a matter of two or three minutes. I have allowed students to generate questions, or I will intentionally choose questions that highlight the diversity of our classroom. They can range from favorite foods, to the ideal place you would like to travel, a language you know or would like to know, etc. Some questions work better than others, and some classes had higher rates of participation than others. I would not do them every day, perhaps once or twice a week. I find them to be a nice way to begin classes and set the right tone or mood for the day.

Sentence Starters (Taken from Kelly Gallagher’s *Deeper Reading*)

To find out where students are having comprehension problems, have them complete the following sentence: “I don’t understand. . .” If it is a difficult passage, have them do multiple “I don’t understand statements.” Then have students meet in small groups to discuss their confusion and perhaps work clear it up. Other sentence starters could include:

I noticed. . .

I wonder. . .

I was reminded of. . .

I think . . .

I’m surprised that. . .

One consequence of _____ could be. . .

If _____, then . . .