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The Research & Planning Group
for California Community Colleges

Reading Apprenticeship

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT # 5

RA Incorporation in Community Colleges

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Summary of Key Observations

The following observations summarize key points generated from a series of interviews that the External Evaluation Team conducted with Reading Apprenticeship (RA) practitioners at three community colleges. The sites were identified by the Strategic Literacy Initiative based on the considerable progress they have achieved incorporating RA.

Impact on Students

There is common agreement that RA:

- Makes students more active participants in their own learning
- Improves the classroom environment
- Enhances the quality of classroom conversations
- Has the potential to increase retention and completion rates
- Improves students' stamina and willingness to engage with difficult text
- Increases students' awareness of what they do not understand and their willingness to admit that they need assistance
- Increases students' use of textbooks
- Improves the quality of group work
- Increases participation in classroom activities among those who tend to be least engaged

Three classroom-based studies documented RA's capacity to improve student outcomes:

- One study conducted in a first-year college composition and reading class found that students in an RA-treatment group had higher retention and success rates than their peers in a control group.
- Another study documented attendance, retention and CASAS scores achieved by Adult Basic Education students in an RA classroom. The study found increased retention and test gains above the national average.
- A third study on student engagement conducted campus wide found that RA students were less likely than their peers to come to class unprepared and more likely to work hard to meet expectations.

Impact on faculty

There is common agreement that RA:

- Increases faculty's awareness of students' potential. Several interviewees reported they are "astounded by the quality of students' thinking" in RA-framed classrooms.
- Has the potential to increase teachers' professional satisfaction. One faculty member commented: "RA has been my antidote to burnout; I am amazed each day at the connections and perceptions that my class bring to the classroom."

Findings from RA Classrooms

Instructors with the most promising outcomes:

- Use of a limited number of RA routines continuously and intensively (rather than occasional use of multiple approaches)

- Have students repeat RA routines until the routines become integrated into the way the students approach all reading assignments
- Are highly committed to RA due to their observations and beliefs about how it can improve student reading, engagement, and learning

Additional classroom perspectives:

- Many instructors teaching content struggle to incorporate RA and cover the curriculum requirements
- Instructors who used to rely mainly on lectures delivered to large numbers of students are experimenting with RA activities that make learning more interactive

Implementation Strategies at the Institutional level

- All three colleges have in place strong Faculty Inquiry Groups (FIGs), which likely contribute to their relatively advanced state of RA incorporation.
- The experience found at one college suggests that dissemination can be strengthened and accelerated when the RA team includes not just faculty, but also individuals with cross-institutional connections who have regular contact with and exert influence on faculty from all disciplines such as librarians, curriculum and technology experts, and counselors.
- The promising incorporation of RA into Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses at one of the colleges studied suggests that RA may have excellent potential in the CTE classrooms
- Several interviewees believe RA incorporation can be accelerated through the engagement in RA of administrators

Professional Development Supporting RA Incorporation

- The FIGs serve as important vehicles for professional development
- Non-instructional staff can play a key role in professional development activities
- Interviewees reported that participation in the Community College Literacy Research Group has played an important role in supporting and advancing incorporation of RA in their classrooms