Ninth-Grade Student Literacy Case Studies

SLI's research team worked with teacher researcher colleagues from three San Francisco Unified School District high schools to identify promising practices from early reading and literacy interventions and teaching approaches that could be adapted for use in high school content area classrooms. These "Literacy Task Force" teachers also identified students for case study whose performance on course reading, literacy assignments, and standardized tests was unexpectedly low, given perceptions of the students’ overall academic capacity.

As part of the study, the teachers regularly collected samples of course work and wrote observations and reflections about their case study students. SLI research staff collected test score data, conducted literacy history interviews, and videotaped dynamic assessments of students' reading of recreational, expository, and narrative texts. From these literacy histories and from students' performances on the dynamic reading assessments, teacher-researchers and SLI researchers created in-depth case studies of 30 ninth grade students and came to a better understanding of why these students were having trouble succeeding in their academic reading.

Some of the key findings to emerge from this study:

- Students were offered very little instructional support in middle and high school in reading
- Teachers often avoided reading since they believed students were unable to comprehend course materials, thus offering fewer and fewer opportunities for reading in school
- While the case study students were clearly inexperienced readers, particularly of academic texts, they did have untapped literacy experience, knowledge as well as a strategic repertoire of problem-solving strategies
- Students might display quite different proficiency in reading and reading comprehension when reading aloud vs. reading silently, and when working with different texts or on different literacy tasks
- Most of these adolescents were relatively inexperienced with expository reading and learning, while demonstrating more experience and expertise in reading narratives.

The following description of these adolescent readers, derived from the study findings, has deeply informed the development of the Reading Apprenticeship instructional framework as well as professional development opportunities designed to shift teachers' perceptions of their students' resources and capabilities.

Do You Recognize These Students?

- Inexperienced but not beginning readers
- View reading as only a school-based activity
- Lack confidence and are mentally passive with academic reading
- Appear to have limited knowledge of topics in school texts
• Have limited comprehension when they do read academic texts
• Not held accountable for much reading
• Expend a lot of energy covering up what they don't understand
• Have misconceptions about reading and learning