

## LITERACY PRACTICES THAT ADOLESCENTS DESERVE



# Building a Culture of Engaged Academic Literacy in Schools



CYNTHIA GREENLEAF, RUTH SCHOENBACH,  
AND LYNN MURPHY

*Dear Educator,*

*The 21st century has brought with it a tremendous evolution in how adolescents engage with text. As adolescents prepare to become productive citizens, they must be able to comprehend and construct information using print and nonprint materials in fixed and virtual platforms across disciplines. In 2012, the International Reading Association published a revised adolescent literacy position statement as a guide for supporting adolescents' ongoing literacy development.*

*The goal of the authors of the statement was to create a living document that brings educators' classrooms to life and makes the eight recommendations of the position statement achievable. This series, **Literacy Practices That Adolescents Deserve**, brings readers inside real classrooms with practical, research-based strategies to implement in classrooms and schools.*

*We invite you to read the text, follow the links, and consider how this may become a part of your work and the work of colleagues.*

*Fondly,*

*Heather Casey, Rider University*

*Susan Lenski, Portland State University*

*Carol Hryniuk-Adamov, Child Guidance Clinic Winnipeg School Division*

*Series Editors*

The downloadable PDF of the full revised position statement and additional adolescent literacy resources from IRA can be accessed online at [www.reading.org/Resources/ResourcesbyTopic/Adolescent/Overview.aspx](http://www.reading.org/Resources/ResourcesbyTopic/Adolescent/Overview.aspx).

In secondary education across the United States, a confluence of new literacy standards and workforce expectations invites fresh thinking about what it means to create a culture of literacy. As described in “Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association” (International Reading Association, 2012), at the classroom, school, and broader system level, administrators, teachers, parents, and students must incorporate new ideas about the place of reading in a subject area, what counts as knowledge, students’ and teachers’ roles in learning, and students’ potential for critical thinking and disciplinary reasoning.

All students will need abundant opportunities to read complex disciplinary text, and their teachers in all subject areas will need to provide ample instructional support to build subject area literacy. Teachers must model how to approach texts in discipline-specific ways and guide students in building a repertoire of text-based problem-solving strategies. But adolescent learners will also need to be willing to *engage* with disciplinary text—to pick it up, give it a shot,

and dig in. Students must be prepared to expect challenge, grapple with confusion, and work to construct meaning by drawing on all the support they can muster—in the text, in their schema, in collaboration with their peers, and with the guidance of their teachers.

For the millions of adolescent learners who do not *expect* to comprehend school texts, teachers’ understanding of reader/learner identity and learner dispositions will take on new importance. Students will need help to develop traits such as tolerance for ambiguity, stamina, persistence in the face of struggle, and valuing the outcome of effortful reading. If students’ academic skills, knowledge, and dispositions are to flourish, students will need to experience a learning culture that is rare—one in which they collaboratively engage in making sense of texts, and everyone’s thinking and reasoning are public.

Teachers of all discipline areas must know how to create a classroom culture of engaged academic literacy so that students gain confidence in their abilities to take up disciplinary reading, solve reading problems, and *understand* what they read.

This is a deep shift in practice for many teachers and must itself be nurtured. School systems must provide structures and time for teachers' high-quality professional development and regular opportunities for collegial support and problem solving. Additionally, administrators must allow for the exploration and "messiness" that accompanies new learning.

Reading Apprenticeship is one example of a sustained, job-embedded approach to developing a schoolwide culture of literacy. Schools in our national Reading Apprenticeship network, as well as international partners in Canada, Germany, and elsewhere, are contributing their experience in developing students' literacy engagement and achievement to our ongoing research—and to the field. The five-year, five-state, federally funded [RAISE](#) (Reading Apprenticeship Improving Secondary Education) project, for example, reaches 400,000 students in 300 schools and includes a randomized controlled trial in a subset of those schools. In that work, we engage history, science, and English language arts teachers in learning to apprentice students to the literacy practices and proficiencies that disciplinary texts demand.

In this article, we explore building a culture of academic literacy in schools using the Reading Apprenticeship model. We begin by briefly describing the principles of the Reading Apprenticeship instructional framework and how these affect student dispositions and learning in the academic disciplines. We then look closer at the Reading Apprenticeship instructional approach in a single classroom. This is followed with examples of professional inquiry that bring teachers inside the

framework and the practices that compose effective implementation in their subject areas.

Toward the end of the article, we discuss the role of site-based teacher leadership and administrative support for building and sustaining a culture of engaged academic literacy across the school community and subject areas. We close by pointing toward larger system structures that can support schools in this work, with examples from the RAISE project and abroad, and we suggest concrete ways to begin building toward an engaged culture of academic literacy.

## The Reading Apprenticeship Framework: Metacognitive Conversation at the Core

Working with thousands of teachers since the early 1990s, the Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) at WestEd developed Reading Apprenticeship to help teachers of all subject areas tap students' untapped potential and teachers' own often invisible expertise as adult readers in their disciplines. The Reading Apprenticeship instructional framework is the shared conceptual framework from which practitioners across our national network generate changes in their classrooms and schools (see Figure). Multiple [research studies](#) of classrooms where teachers have had Reading Apprenticeship professional development of significant duration, quality, and intensity have shown significant gains in students' content learning, for example of biology or U.S. history, as well as their reading comprehension and on measures of engagement and self-efficacy.

With metacognitive conversation at the center, the Reading Apprenticeship instructional framework fosters cognitive and socioemotional learning factors in four overlapping dimensions of classroom life teachers must attend to if they are to foster literacy growth for adolescents (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012):

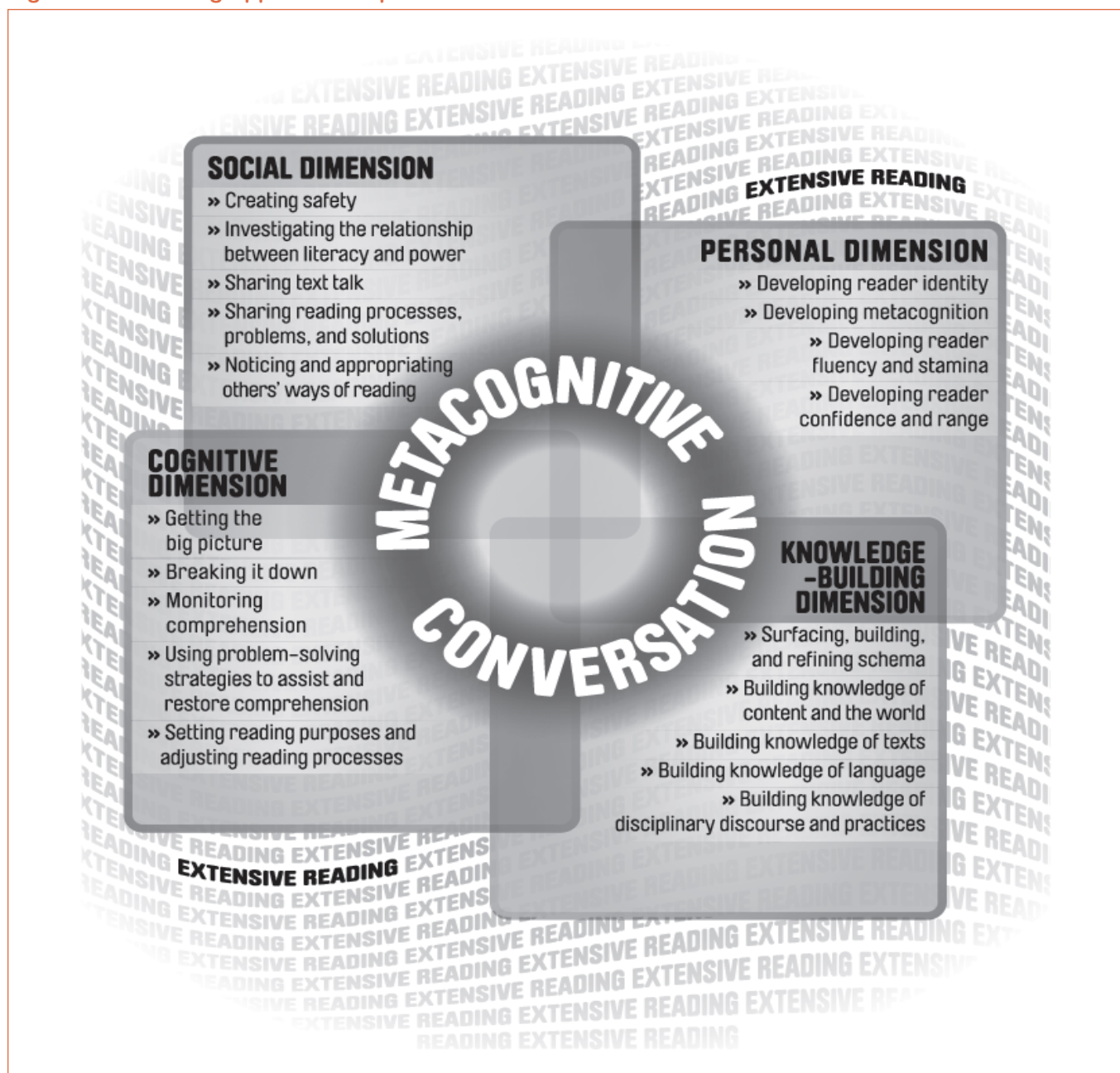
- The *social dimension* involves building community. The classroom becomes a safe environment where students feel comfortable sharing what they have understood and what they struggled to understand in complex texts. They see other students and their teacher as resources for learning. In such a community, students can engage in productive academic behaviors.



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.



**Figure. The Reading Apprenticeship Instructional Framework**



Note. A full description of the Reading Apprenticeship Instructional Framework appears as [Chapter 2](#) of *Reading for Understanding: How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms* (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012).

We see the social dimension in a [video](#) from Cindy Ryan's classroom (Ryan & Litman, 2013), where students are comfortable taking academic risks and solving reading problems collaboratively.

- The *personal dimension* includes developing students' identities as competent readers and learners, building their awareness of their purposes and goals for reading and learning. Students who can connect current academic tasks to future career or educational goals are more

likely to exhibit persistence and other behaviors that support academic performance.

In a [vignette](#) from teacher Will Brown's chemistry class (Schoenbach et al., 2012), we can see the work a teacher and student do to turn an inexperienced science reader into a resilient learner.

- The *cognitive dimension* involves developing students' mental processes, including their problem-solving strategies with disciplinary

texts. Effective learning is characterized by metacognition, self-regulation, and cognitive strategies that contribute to deeper understanding and learning, improved academic performance, and feelings of self-efficacy. Strategic cognitive moves, specific to the discipline, are fostered by teacher modeling and support for student practice.

Students in this [video](#) from Rita Jensen's eighth-grade ESL class (Jensen & Litman, 2013) use strategies of making connections, asking questions, and collaborating to understand a poem in what is for them a new language.

- The *knowledge-building dimension* includes identifying the knowledge readers bring to a discipline and to disciplinary texts and further developing that knowledge through interaction with the text, learning tasks, and other readers and learners. As they read, students build their knowledge of subject area content and also of language and word construction, disciplinary genres and text structures, and disciplinary-specific discourse practices. Students engage in tasks that reflect disciplinary inquiry practices. The teachers facilitate the unique inquiry processes necessary to each discipline.

A [vignette](#) from Gayle Cribb's honors U.S. history class (Schoenbach et al., 2012) is an example of how disciplinary knowledge building flourishes in a classroom where norms of inquiry and academic problem solving are in place.

- *Metacognitive conversation* is an inquiry into how readers make sense of text. The conversation is both internal, as individual readers observe their own minds in action, and external, when readers discuss what they are noticing, what they are stumped by, and how they are solving reading problems. Talking about what one's own mind is doing is a developmentally seductive hook for most adolescents and a challenge for some. Sharing these invisible processes in discussions can contribute insights, clarify confusions, and support others in their future reflections.

We see a metacognitive conversation in Cindy Ryan's classroom [video](#) demonstrating the social dimension when one student thinks out loud, momentarily confused about what a sentence may mean, and a classmate stops her, genuinely curious to know what clues she is using to figure it out.



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.

## Changing Classroom Culture: It's Cool to Be Confused

By middle school and high school, many discouraged students excuse themselves from academic effort, believing their academic identity is fixed: "My brain doesn't work that way." Other students, who have found the early grades easy, may have no idea what to do once literacy demands ramp up: "Just tell us what you want us to know," they may complain. The Reading Apprenticeship framework asks students to take an inquiry stance, to notice where they get stuck, and to let others in on their confusions as well as what they do understand. In a classroom where it's cool, not shameful, to be confused, problem solving is a shared exercise, and everyone can learn in the clarification process.

In the [video](#) of teacher Cindy Ryan's academic literacy classroom, Cindy uses the Reading Apprenticeship framework to attend to all of her students' strengths, challenges, and needs and to help them engage with increasingly complex text. She creates a culture of engaged academic literacy in a classroom where students' scores on standardized reading tests show them reading two to five grades below grade level. These are students who arrived in her class with a sense of fixed identity as "not-good" readers. They often think reading is some kind of magical ability that other people have, but they do not. Cindy has taught them to take an inquiry stance—a code-breaking stance that gives them the sense they can figure things out, especially if they work together.

In Reading Apprenticeship classrooms, students learn to ask themselves What do I know? What do I not know? and What do I need to know right here



and now to understand this text and move forward? This isn't something that the teacher does for them, but a repertoire of skills and strategies they develop over time.

This approach is made possible by providing students with a welcoming classroom climate and the cognitive strategies that build their confidence and ability to tackle difficult work. In classrooms of all ability levels, when students engage with complex texts in new ways, the level of classroom discourse and learning increases for them all.

When teachers are able to consistently model and provide scaffolded support with feedback for trying on new ways of acting, thinking, and interacting, students can experience new and more positive academic identities. The difference can transform their academic destinies.

## Professional Development as Literacy Inquiry

If we want students to be able to do more challenging disciplinary tasks with more complex texts as measured by correspondingly more challenging assessments, many subject area teachers will need additional and new kinds of professional support to teach in the new ways this kind of learning requires. Subject area teachers we have worked with often have a hard time giving up past practices designed to help students learn content that both teachers and students assume they won't learn from assigned but uncompleted or misunderstood reading.

"I was a PowerPoint junkie," admits Dr. Ericka Senegar-Mitchell, an expert high school biology teacher who carefully crafted slide presentations of what she wanted students to know. "I am a recovering member of that practice and no longer do I, in my opinion, harm my students with a constant lifting of the information for them. I have learned to step away from my clicker and to sit down with them and to struggle and dig in with them."

Helping subject area teachers move from lecture notes, PowerPoint presentations, and other front-of-the-room practices to those of "sitting down with students" to facilitate their independent and collaborative learning requires a major shift in teachers' understanding of their role and their instructional responsibilities.

The design of Reading Apprenticeship professional development reflects the research

knowledge base about effective teacher professional development. Research in the field—including our own studies—indicates a growing consensus about essential elements of effective professional development for teachers. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Kennedy, 1998; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999; Reed, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

Among the important characteristics that have emerged from research studies are these: (1) a focus on how students learn in the subject area—in the case of Reading Apprenticeship, how students become more proficient, literate practitioners in the disciplines (Abell, 2008; Greenleaf et al., 2011; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Kennedy, 1998; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999; Reed, 2009; van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001), (2) involving teachers collectively in professional development (Borko, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999; V. Richardson, 1994), (3) providing active learning engagements for teachers, over sufficient time for new learning and inquiry practices to take root (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Kennedy, 1998; Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, & Hewson, 2009; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wilson & Berne, 1999), and (4) job embeddedness, or inviting collaborative problem solving and generativity to address the context in which people are working (Coburn, 2003; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

We have found that by engaging teachers in a variety of inquiries into their own and their students' reading practices, we can assist them in



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.

constructing richer and more complex theories of reading, seeing their students' capacities to read and learn in new and more generous ways, and drawing on and developing their own resources and knowledge as teachers of reading in their discipline. Importantly, we have seen teachers remake their classrooms into places where students develop new identities as capable academic readers.

To help teachers understand the power of the Reading Apprenticeship framework for students, Reading Apprenticeship professional development immerses teachers in the same instructional approaches they are asked to promote in their classrooms. They participate in close reading of difficult disciplinary texts, inquiring into how they, as expert readers of their discipline, engage with and make meaning of complex text. They participate in close inquiry into videos and transcripts of students reading and of classroom interactions where teachers are implementing the Reading Apprenticeship framework.

As teachers participate in these inquiries, they continually reflect on their own experiences as learners in the professional development, making connections from these social, personal, cognitive, metacognitive, and knowledge-building experiences to their classrooms. Through these transformative moments in professional development, teachers internalize new understandings that they can then carry into their classrooms. This is markedly different from professional development in which teachers hear from experts or practice new strategies without exploring challenges and processes in their own disciplinary reading, writing, and reasoning. The following is an example of professional development that teachers internalize deeply.

## Transformative Teacher Tasks

A group of science teachers confront the 241-word [abstract of “Methanotropic bacteria occupy benthic microbial mats in shallow marine hydrocarbon seeps, Coal Oil Point, California,”](#) an article from the *Journal of Geophysical Research* (Ding & Valentine, 2008). In this Reading Apprenticeship professional development session, the teachers realize they are about to be plunged into the deep waters so familiar to many of their science students.

The professional development facilitator asks the teachers to scan the text with these questions



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.

in mind: (a) Make connections—What do you know about this kind of text, the topic, the language being used? (b) Make predictions about your reading—How hard will it be? How will you adjust your reading processes to get ready? What do you already know that might help?

After a 30-second preview, teachers exchange ideas about the strategies and learning dispositions they are going to need as they grapple with this dense text:

“I saw this is an article from a science journal, and that sort of scared me.”

“I read the title three times. I thought, I’ll need to buckle down, take some notes.”

“I saw big words, tough words. Some of the symbols, I wasn’t sure what was going on. But on the other hand, I know a lot of it too, so that pulled me in.”

“I ignored the words I didn’t know in the title and used a lot of prior knowledge. Being an earth science teacher, I knew that *benthic* is a layer of the ocean. I knew the word *bacteria*, of course. And I knew *hydrocarbon seeps* because I’m in the fracking center of Pennsylvania.”

“I’m going to have to take the complex language and put it into plain English so I can tuck it away and remember what this article is about.”

These teachers’ experiences, of sharing clues to what they may already know and of taking comfort in the recognition that everyone will be engaged in effortful reading, suggest to them that students’ might benefit from similar experiences to make the hard work ahead more manageable.

The teachers go on to try out other strategies for understanding this text. They identify potential roadblocks and take them on.





Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.

For example, they find “survival words” they believe are vital to text meaning and worthy of diligence and clarification. They think aloud with one another, sharing insights about those words. They nominate sentences with complex syntax or other challenges to comprehension for collaborative “sentence detective work.” And they incorporate language-learning strategies as part of their work: identifying transition words that signal text structure, analyzing word parts (i.e., prefixes, roots, and suffixes), and examining context to clarify the possible meanings of the *methanotroph* word family, which is clearly key to understanding this text. Along the way, they realize from their knowledge of science and of science text structure that this abstract, however brief and at first glance impenetrable, is putting forward a scientific argument—a claim based on an investigation and its results.

Throughout, teachers in the professional development do not go it alone. They work in cycles with a partner or trio, stopping periodically to share their progress with the whole group and capture the “science-reading and language-learning strategies” they are employing. They recognize firsthand the value of similar inquiry and discovery for their students.

When these science teachers complete their inquiry, they spend a few minutes debriefing and reflecting on how the different dimensions of the Reading Apprenticeship framework have come into play. Stefan, for example, recognizes the importance of the social dimension in helping him process the reading: “Just the simple act of talking about the reading with someone helps me clarify my thinking. And then having time to go back and reflect and

come back and talk—the back and forth between reflection and talking was very helpful.”

Paul is struck by the interaction of the social dimension with the cognitive and personal dimensions. For him, the value of sharing strategies with a partner or in the whole group is a new way to think about what helps people learn: “The pair and then the whole-group sharing was definitely support for this whole thinking about what I’m doing when I read. From the social part, I pick up different strategies. I’m going to have my own—but they don’t always work perfectly for every situation—and it’s nice to hear somebody else’s and see that model. So I’m really into the support of the social dimension to give me cognitive growth. And in the personal dimension, identifying my own strategies gave me more power over the reading.”

For Maribel, who has some related topic knowledge to contribute to her group, collaboration allows her to recognize that she can help others as well as benefit from shared problem solving: “At first the text is very confusing, but feeling like I could help my partners with a little bit of knowledge made me feel more comfortable and competent to ask questions about it.”

This shift for subject area teachers from private to public thinking can feel risky. But because Reading Apprenticeship professional development makes academic risk taking the norm, teachers, though they may be apprehensive at first (like Maribel), with time and practice, will feel their way toward comfort and competence.

Just as our focus for students is on building their flexible, personal repertoires for engaging with text, our focus for teachers is on building their personal ownership of core Reading Apprenticeship ideas and practices so they can respond flexibly to the changing needs and challenges of the classroom.

We want teachers to have these ideas and practices “in their bones.” More even than Reading Apprenticeship professional development, they will need ongoing experiences inquiring into their students’ work and their own and one another’s classroom practice, in cycles of continual reflection and improvement. This is where supportive teacher leaders and professional learning communities are essential in creating a culture to facilitate the change process.



## Teacher Leadership for Collegial Growth and Sustainable Reform

Professional ownership of the deep content of reforms is well known to be essential for high-quality implementation and sustainability of reforms that touch the heart of classroom practice (Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1996). Because ownership grows with experience and understanding, teachers of all disciplines benefit from regular opportunities to try out and reflect collegially on their new practices. In some schools, professional learning communities are a regular structure built into teachers' schedules. In many others, however, collegial learning is quite informal and depends on highly motivated teachers.

Teachers who take on various kinds of leadership roles working with Reading Apprenticeship may informally share ideas and student work in conversations with colleagues or, more formally, present what they are learning in department, grade-level, or other professional learning meetings. When there is sufficient commitment from other teachers and administrators to carve out regular meeting time to focus on implementing Reading Apprenticeship, teacher leaders often play a key role in establishing an overall climate for taking risks, maintaining an inquiry focus, and protecting time for professional reflection.

In the five-state RAISE project, we require schools to give participating teachers time to meet as professional colleagues—to learn together and evolve their understanding and practice of Reading Apprenticeship. (See the [RAISE organizational model](#), including school teams, teacher leaders,

and state and national coordinators.) In a school, RAISE teachers (as few as 3 and as many as 10) meet monthly as a team. These meetings are organized by teacher leaders who are transparent about sharing their own practice—"the good, bad, and ugly"—and who can facilitate nonjudgmental exchange among all team members as they bring their classroom experiences to the group. In some schools teacher leaders share the role, some are tapped by their administrator, and some transition into leadership roles as their understanding of Reading Apprenticeship grows.

There are, of course, some built-in challenges for teachers taking on new leadership roles. Social dynamics in a group of veteran teachers may be an issue for young or new teachers taking leadership responsibility. One young teacher, for example, had graduated not too many years earlier from the school where she was now a new teacher leader. Recognizing why she sometimes struggled for her team members' attention, she had to laugh, "I had some of them for teachers!"

Other leadership challenges, such as balancing efficient meeting facilitation with respecting colleagues' needs for different ways of working and thinking, may also initially undermine a teacher leader's effectiveness. Learning to lead in an inquiry model, like learning most things, benefits from support to learn new skill sets, attitudes, and dispositions.

RAISE teacher leaders have appreciated the support they receive in three all-day meetings each year. These regional meetings are facilitated by state and national Reading Apprenticeship leaders and advisors as times when teacher leaders can clarify their leadership role, exchange leadership challenges and solutions, and build leadership skills.

Part of each day is also devoted to deepening teacher leaders' own Reading Apprenticeship classroom practice. In our view, the idea that teacher leaders "lead from practice" is basic to their effectiveness. In sessions with peers and advisors, teacher leaders practice protocols for probing and extending one another's classroom experiences. As teacher leaders learn more about their own practice, they are also learning what it takes to facilitate professional learning for their school teams.

Another focus of the teacher leader meetings is collaboration across the larger school culture to gain increased buy-in from administrators,



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.

students, parents, and other teachers. In some of our work with networks of schools, for example, working with a group of New York City middle schools, site administrators attend part of the teacher leader meetings. Their increased knowledge and active participation is a valuable asset for changing a school's literacy culture.

## Knowledgeable Administrator Support for an Engaged Academic Literacy Culture

Administrator support for the work of changing a school's literacy culture begins with protecting the time and resources teachers need for professional development and collegial learning, but perhaps equally important is administrators' understanding of what teachers are trying to accomplish, how it differs from previous practices, and how it may evolve.

When administrators attend professional development with their teachers or participate in administrator professional development designed to engage them with their literacy team, in department professional learning meetings, and in classroom observations, these job-embedded activities build cross-role understandings that accelerate a school's development of a literacy culture.

Administrators are always encouraged to attend Reading Apprenticeship professional development with their teachers, and many do for at least part of the time. Many other administrators take an [online course](#) that "assigns" them to meet regularly with their team of Reading Apprenticeship teachers and observe in their classrooms. This kind of job-embedded professional development for administrators makes them more knowledgeable as well as more supportive of their teachers' efforts to change their practices.

As a teacher starting out with Reading Apprenticeships explains, "What I needed was a principal who understood when he did a walk-through of my classroom that it was going to be messy sometimes. I had that, and it was great." Similarly, a high school principal acknowledges the importance of such fieldwork: "The job-embedded activities forced me to be more involved with my team and my students that are implementing Reading Apprenticeship. I feel that I have a better working knowledge of key concepts and understand the obstacles to implementation. This working knowledge has helped me be more visionary and forward-thinking in terms of support and budget allocation."

Because budget concerns are a constant in school and district planning, administrators must husband professional development time to support teachers' shifts toward a literacy culture. Time set aside in staff meetings, in department meetings, in professional learning communities, and in district PD days can add up to substantial learning time. In some cases, administrators have a more defensive role—to protect teachers' professional learning time from outright cuts.

For example, in a school faced with a shrinking budget, the principal includes teacher leadership for Reading Apprenticeship in her list of nonnegotiables: "We've been losing a lot in public education because we've decided everything's negotiable. There should be some things that aren't negotiable. For example, freeing up our teacher leader third hour to be able to help teachers on both lunch breaks should not be something that we negotiate away, because we know how valuable that is."

At this school, where the administrator supports faculty collaboration and faculty leadership, teachers willingly take on the extra work involved in new learning for the benefit of their students. Successful change seems to occur in a school culture where there is some pressure and support from the administration or literacy team "top down" as well as determination and persistence from the teachers, "bottom up" (Fullan, 1994, 2001).

At schools most likely to create a culture of literacy, all high-priority reforms have complementary approaches toward subject area literacy, and administrators, teacher leaders, and other leaders help the community see how high-priority reforms can be complementary—how they



feed into rather than distract from or compete with a focus on literacy.

For example, in making the case for Reading Apprenticeship in a school's comprehensive literacy plan, one school administrator puts it this way: "How do we tie Reading Apprenticeship in with other things that we've got going on, so that this isn't an add-on, but part of what we do all the time. I think making sure that we figure out how it ties in is really important."

## Larger System Supports for Schools

The challenging work within a school of building and sustaining engaged academic literacy across the disciplines takes place within larger environments; these are buffeted by changing and often less-than-coherent political, social, and economic forces that create pressures on schools and the individuals in them. Larger educational units beyond schools, such as districts, county offices, states, provinces, or ministries, can provide support for schools to implement literacy reforms with fidelity to both the goals and approaches that make them powerful and the flexibility needed to adapt appropriately to local conditions (McDonald, Keesler, Kauffman, & Schneider, 2006). When this kind of "flexible fidelity" is appreciated and protected, reform practices are most likely to be sustained and deepened over time.

In the five-state [RAISE model](#), for example, a uniquely powerful role is that of RAISE statewide coordinators. These coordinators facilitate the teacher leader meetings described earlier, but they do much more. They visit and support school teams—sometimes joining in by Skype as teacher leaders facilitate team meetings. They stay in touch with school administrators and keep Reading Apprenticeship on their radar. Through monthly meetings convened by the RAISE multisites coordinator, statewide coordinators share with one another and national Reading Apprenticeship leaders at the Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) what they are learning, what problems they are facing, and how to move ahead in the future.

Charged to "plan with sustainability in mind," statewide coordinators reach out to link to other reform initiatives in their states and to increase visibility of Reading Apprenticeship. They convene

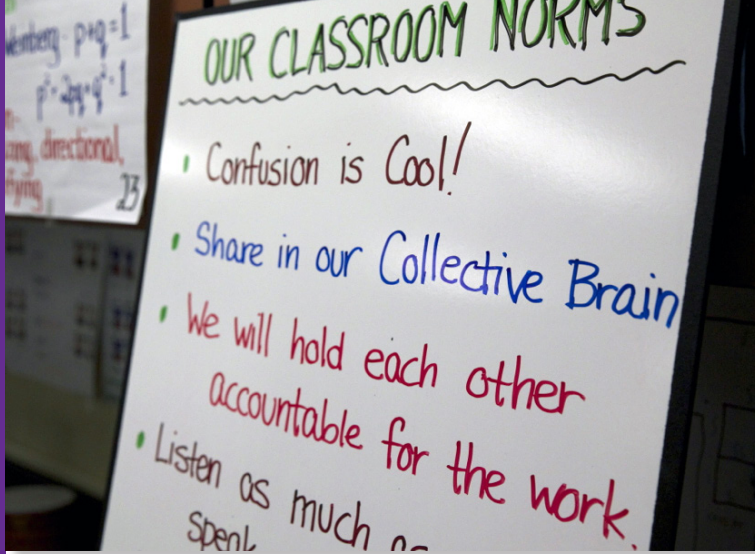
state forums featuring the work of local RAISE schools, and they make presentations at local, state, and regional conferences. In all these ways and more, the RAISE statewide coordinators hold a larger vision for the direction of the work, and they provide crucial locally contextualized support and a two-way communication channel to inform and learn from the national SLI work.

We can also look to examples from other countries that have adopted Reading Apprenticeship at a large, systemic level. In Canada's Province of Manitoba, one of the province's English Language Arts and Literacy Consultants, Shelley Warkentin, has worked with her colleagues and the SLI national office to develop a three-year pilot project and rollout for Reading Apprenticeship implementation that includes building deep Reading Apprenticeship capacity for the province's expert literacy coaches and teacher leaders. She knows how important the focus on the disciplinary expertise of participating teachers has been to their commitment to the project, and she keeps discipline-based inquiry in the center of the work. (An [article](#) published by the Reading Council of Greater Winnipeg online journal, *Reading Manitoba*, [Richardson & Warkentin, 2014] describes this provincial work.)

In Germany, wide adoption of Reading Apprenticeship initiated and facilitated by our colleague Dorothee Gaille has taken root with systemwide support in the state of Hesse, in Hamburg, and in other German states and cities. These broad implementation supports included, in the Hesse case, a sophisticated "multiplier" model



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.



Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.

of qualifying 180 teacher leaders over five years to work with new cohorts of teachers in 500 schools.

## Ways to Begin

The immediate starting point for building a culture of engaged academic literacy is in classrooms: Subject area teachers and their students begin to create shared classroom norms and take risks of sharing their ways of thinking, solving problems, and making meaning of the texts in their disciplines.

Schools that have the potential for more systemic support may be able to work with existing teacher leaders and others to build their own best versions of effective literacy communities in which subject area teachers, students, administrators, parents, and other community members are actively engaged in sharing favorite books, exchanging personal reading histories, and understanding that struggle with challenging text is normal and that teachers and students can be supported to do it successfully.

In this way, the work of building a school culture for engaged academic literacy across the academic disciplines can mean much more than preparing students for a new set of assessments. Instead it can be a path by which a school and its broader community create a more dynamic culture of diverse voices, authentic questions, and new and deeper understandings.

For individual teachers who want to learn more about what a Reading Apprenticeship culture of literacy looks like, resources include our book [Reading for Understanding](#) and [free downloads](#) from the book, including the complete Chapter 2 description of the Reading Apprenticeship

framework and its basis in literacy research. On our [website](#) are also brief [videos](#) that provide a vision of what subject area teachers and students do to make Reading Apprenticeship come alive in their classrooms.

Although some intrepid readers will be eager to investigate these ideas and practices on their own, for many, collegial support will make the difference between considering and actually trying approaches in which classroom roles may have to radically change. Working through the chapters of *Reading for Understanding* as a small community of inquiry and discussing the online classroom videos together can be the initial catalyst that is needed. Principals should consider joining this inquiry community, both to learn from and with their teachers and to understand how to support them. A culture of literacy in schools is defined by its inclusiveness—for the adults as well as the students.

To create a culture of engaged academic literacy in schools, students, teachers, and administrators will necessarily all play key roles:

### Students

- Will expect to read and understand increasingly complex disciplinary text, in every class
- Will expect to encounter and persist in resolving reading problems and confusions
- Will expect to find literacy support from teacher modeling, peer collaboration, and their own increasing competence and self-confidence

### Teachers

- Will develop an inquiry stance toward their own and their students' disciplinary reading
- Will develop a collaborative culture to support their own learning
- Will develop a collaborative inquiry culture in their classrooms
- Will provide students with abundant reading opportunities
- Will provide students with scaffolded literacy support

### Administrators

- Will provide structures and time for teachers to build an inquiry culture
- Will provide books and resources to support a literacy culture



- Will become knowledgeable about teachers' literacy goals and practices
- Will align other priority initiatives to support a focus on engaged academic literacy
- Will let parents and other community members in on the goals of focusing on engaged academic literacy

## Letting Parents In On It

At a high school event featuring free spaghetti dinner, parents, teachers, and students chime in as the principal describes a literacy approach this small, rural Pennsylvania school has recently adopted. His goal is to invite parents into the culture of engaged literacy that will touch every student in the school. Reading Apprenticeship, he explains, is an instructional framework designed to change students' relationship with subject area reading, writing, and reasoning.

With this approach, instead of being told what is important, students are being challenged to read and think about what they do know, recognize what they don't understand and need to figure out, and then take a problem-solving stance to dig in toward comprehension. They take on complex texts, they compare and relate them and, when confusion prevails, they collaborate. "Why should my boy know how to do this?" one father asks. "He's not going to college."

The principal asks this parent to consider what it would take for his son to rewire a garage, something the father agrees his boy should know how to do. It becomes apparent that literacy skills such as reading blueprints, product descriptions, complex installation instructions, and construction codes would be needed, as well as relating all these different documents, knowing when to find more information, and rereading to troubleshoot when something goes wrong. And what about working with others to figure things out, in the shop or on a job site?

Principal Harley Ramsey knows his community, and he knows that most parents have had short, very traditional school careers. If their teenagers come home complaining that teachers are expecting much more reading and new levels of engagement and effort from them, he wants parents to know why. Ramsey settled on Reading Apprenticeship for the Otto-Eldred Junior Senior

High School after interviews with leaders from area businesses and universities to find out what they wanted from future employees or students. As Ramsey explains to parents over plates of spaghetti, "They want strategic thinkers, problem solvers. That's what's missing now."

## Questions for Reflection

- To what extent do teachers' current practices assist students in building learning dispositions as well as literacy skills?
- To what extent does current professional development support subject area teachers in (a) building insights into the structures and demands of the texts and literacy practices of their disciplines and (b) addressing students' related literacy needs?
- In what ways are our administrators and site-based professional learning communities contributing to creating a schoolwide culture of engaged literacy?

## References

- Abell, S.K. (2008). Twenty years later: Does pedagogical content knowledge remain a useful idea? *International Journal of Science Education*, 30(10), 1405–1416. doi:10.1080/09500690802187041
- Ball, D., & Cohen, D. (1999). Developing practice, developing practitioners: Toward a practice-based theory of professional education. In G. Sykes and L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 3–32). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3–15. doi:10.3102/0013189X033008003
- Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., & Cocking, R.R. (Eds.). (2000). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school: (Expanded ed.)*. Washington, DC: National Academy.
- Coburn, C.E. (2003). Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Educational Researcher*, 32(6), 3–12. doi:10.3102/0013189X032006003
- Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R.C., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad*. Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council.
- Ding, H., & Valentine, D.L. (2008). Methanotrophic bacteria occupy benthic microbial mats in shallow marine hydrocarbon seeps, Coal Oil Point, California. *Journal of Geophysical Research: Biogeosciences*, 113(G1), G01015. doi:10.1029/2007JG000537
- Elmore, R.F. (1996). Getting to scale with good educational practice. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 1–26.
- Fullan, M. (1994). Coordinating top-down and bottom-up strategies for educational reform. In R.J. Anson (Ed.), *Systemic reform: Perspectives on personalizing education* (pp. 7–24).

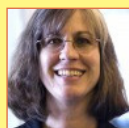
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Garet, M.S., Porter, A.C., Desimone, L., Birman, B.F., & Yoon, K.S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915–945. doi:10.3102/00028312038004915
- Greenleaf, C., Hanson, T., Herman, J., Litman, C., Rosen, R., Schneider, S., & Silver, D. (2011). *A study of the efficacy of Reading Apprenticeship Professional Development for high school history and science teaching and learning: Final report to Institute for Education Sciences*. Retrieved from [www.wested.org/research\\_study/reading-apprenticeship-professional-development-in-high-school-history-and-biology](http://www.wested.org/research_study/reading-apprenticeship-professional-development-in-high-school-history-and-biology)
- Guskey, T.R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and teaching: Theory and practice*, 8(3), 381–391. doi:10.1080/135406002100000512
- Guskey, T.R., & Huberman, M. (1995). *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Guskey, T.R., & Yoon, K.S. (2009). What works in professional development? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(7), 495–500.
- International Reading Association. (2012). *Adolescent literacy* (Position statement, Rev. 2012 ed.). Newark, DE: Author.
- Jensen, R., & Litman, C. (2013). *Middle school ESL* [DVD]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
- Kennedy, M.M. (1998). Education reform and subject matter knowledge. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 35(3), 249–263. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2736(199803)35:3<249::AID-TEA2>3.0.CO;2-R
- Loucks-Horsley, S., & Matsumoto, C. (1999). Research on professional development for teachers of mathematics and science: The state of the scene. *School Science and Mathematics*, 99(5), 258–271. doi:10.1111/j.1949-8594.1999.tb17484.x
- Loucks-Horsley, S., Stiles, K.E., Mundry, S.E., Love, N.B., & Hewson, P.W. (2009). *Designing professional development for teachers of Science and Mathematics* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- McDonald, S.-K., Keesler, V.A., Kauffman, N.J., & Schneider, B. (2006). Scaling-up exemplary interventions. *Educational Researcher*, 35(3), 15–24. doi:10.3102/0013189X035003015
- Reed, D.K. (2009). A synthesis of professional development on the implementation of literacy strategies for middle school content area teachers. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 32(10).
- Richardson, L., & Warkentin, S. (2014). *Turning the tables in Manitoba schools: Taking a long view of professional learning and literacy development*. Retrieved from [readingapprenticeship.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Reading-Apprenticeship-in-Manitoba-Schools.pdf](http://readingapprenticeship.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Reading-Apprenticeship-in-Manitoba-Schools.pdf)
- Richardson, V. (1994). *Teacher change and the staff development process*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ryan, C., & Litman, C. (2013). *Grade 9 academic literacy* [DVD]. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
- Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C., & Murphy, L. (2012). *Reading for understanding: How Reading Apprenticeship improves disciplinary learning in secondary and college classrooms* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sparks, D., & Hirsh, S. (1997). *A new vision for staff development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- van Driel, J.H., Beijaard, D., & Verloop, N. (2001). Professional development and reform in science education: The role of teachers' practical knowledge. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 38(2), 137–158. doi:10.1002/1098-2736(200102)38:2<137::AID-TEA1001>3.0.CO;2-U
- Wilson, S.M., & Berne, J. (1999). Teacher learning and the acquisition of professional knowledge: An examination of research on contemporary professional development. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 173–209.
- Yoon, K.S., Duncan, T., Lee, S.W.-Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K.L. (2007). *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2007–No. 033). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved from [ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs)

Copyright © 2014 WestEd. All rights reserved. No reproduction or transmittal of this photograph is permitted.





## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Cynthia Greenleaf** is codirector of WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI). For more than two decades she has conducted research in adolescent literacy and translated it into cutting-edge teacher professional development. She is a principal developer of the Reading Apprenticeship Instructional Framework, which is the theoretical foundation for all work conducted by SLI. Cyndy has been principal investigator or coprincipal investigator on a range of foundation and federally funded research projects studying the Reading Apprenticeship professional development model for improving subject area literacy in grades 6–12. She can be reached at [cgreenl@wested.org](mailto:cgreenl@wested.org).



**Ruth Schoenbach** founded the Strategic Literacy Initiative 1995 and codirects SLI. Her early work in the San Francisco, California, school system as a teacher,

curriculum developer, and project director in the fields of humanities and language development informs her leadership and role as a principal developer of the Reading Apprenticeship Instructional Framework. Ruth has directed or codirected multiyear projects investigating the Reading Apprenticeship approach in middle school, high school, and college. In addition to in-person professional development, she has designed online and blended professional learning for teachers of grades 6–12 and community college. She can be reached at [rschoen@wested.org](mailto:rschoen@wested.org).

**Lynn Murphy** is director of materials development for the SLI. She is a coauthor with Ruth and Cyndy of *Reading for Understanding: How Reading Apprenticeship Improves Disciplinary Learning in Secondary and College Classrooms*. She can be reached at [lmurphy@wested.org](mailto:lmurphy@wested.org).

### “Literacy Practices That Adolescents Deserve” is edited by:



**Heather Casey**  
(Rider University)



**Susan Lenski**  
(Portland State University)



**Carol Hryniuk-Adamov**  
(Child Guidance Clinic  
Winnipeg School Division)

IRA E-ssentials © 2014 International Reading Association  
ISSN 2326-7216 (online) | No. 8066

All rights reserved. This downloadable PDF is intended for use by the purchaser only. Your download allows one person to retain an electronic copy of the file for personal and classroom use. Display of any portion of this PDF on an intranet or website is prohibited. It is illegal to reproduce, store in or introduce into a retrieval system or database, or transmit any portion of this PDF in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior permission of the International Reading Association. By using only authorized electronic or print editions and not participating in or encouraging piracy of copyrighted materials, you support the rights of authors and publishers.

For more information about IRA E-ssentials and for submission guidelines, e-mail [books@reading.org](mailto:books@reading.org).

**INTERNATIONAL**  
**Reading Association**  
800 BARKSDALE ROAD, PO BOX 8139  
NEWARK, DE 19714-8139, USA  
[www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)