

Keeping it Real – Using genuine purpose and audience to ignite student learning

When students write or speak in class, who is their audience? And what is their communicative purpose? Usually, the audience is you, the teacher, and the purpose is to answer your questions and show you they have understood or done what you asked.

Pretty exciting, yes?

Well, no. Is it any wonder so many students can't see the point? And how does such school work prepare our students for the kinds of writing and speaking they will be doing in "the real world"?

The Florida Standards for Literacy can provide us with some direction. Listening and Speaking Standard 6 tells us that students should learn to speak for "a variety of contexts and communicative tasks." And Writing Standard 10 calls for students to write for "a range of tasks, purposes and audiences." ... All this while "focused on discipline-specific content" and "attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing."

When we consider those literacy standards in designing our classroom instruction, we can not only reach a richer level of disciplinary understanding for the student, but also ignite their imaginations and desire to learn.

Here is one strategy to get started.

RAFT, or Role-Audience-Format-Task

The RAFT strategy, which can be adapted to all levels and content areas, asks students to work for a clear purpose, with a specific focus, in a discipline-related context. It may be assigned for group, pair or individual work.

Grades 6-12 Example

You are an epidemiologist (**R**) who has found alarming trends in flue incidence in a region. Write an advisory (**F**) for county health providers (**A**) to explain your findings and recommend emergency measures (**T**).

For this task, the teacher will provide students with data which they must graph and interpret. They will also need to research what health measure should be put into place, and the format of a health advisory. RAFTs are ideal for cross-curricular projects. This one might involve health, science, math, and/or language arts.

Grades K-5 Example

You have been studying about kinds of motion, and now you and your classmates are an experts (**R**). But the kids in first grade (**A**) don't know very much about motion. Create a picture book (**F**) to teach them about kinds of motion (**T**). As a follow-up, have your students share their books with the first grade class.

For this task, students may want to work with each other to take photographs to use in their books. As a class, you will want to examine a big picture book so they understand the format of what they will be working on.

There are many ways to enrich student learning through contextualized tasks. No doubt, you and your colleagues can suggest a few of your own. Please get in touch if you have any questions: Julia.Somers-Arthur@fldoe.org, Literacy Specialist, Bureau of Standards and Instructional Support