

Reading Institute for Academic Purposes

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What High School Teachers are Saying About the Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC)

As teachers, we all know that integrating new materials into our curriculum can be challenging. Below, teachers share various ways in which slowing down the pace has helped their students begin to acquire the habits of mind so critical to developing skillful reading and writing.

Teachers say that the ERWC Materials Encourage Them to Slow Down the Pace

“What you guys gave us was helpful in the sense that it slowed things down, really made students pull apart their reading and ...I still don't think they get that that's what they have to do when they go to college or when they read dense [material]. They think they can peruse it once, write an essay and pull off a C and 'it's all good.' It was hard for them to slow down and [it was difficult for me to] make them understand that this is what good readers do – they look for little tiny things... So [the pace of the ERWC curriculum] forced me to slow down with the knowledge that slowing down is right.” (AG, Alameda)

ERWC Materials Help Teachers Imagine New Ways of Approaching Practice

“I think [the ERWC] materials really helped me understand where my students need to be. That helps a great deal – to understand exactly what they need to do when it comes to college-level writing.” (JS, Bakersfield)

Changes Teachers See in Students' Abilities Associated with ERWC Curriculum (ERWC is EAP)

One teacher described the need to “level with her students” – to help them think about the work they do in school as a precursor to what they can expect to do in college and beyond. She felt that students ought to know what the EAP curriculum is intended to achieve. And so for her, creating student buy-in was important:

“The day that I came back from the first EAP training with my binder, I looked through it that night and I thought wow, this is really good stuff and this is what seniors need and especially because I know at this school I think 20% of the kids pass the EPT so I thought we've got to change this ASAP. We can't let my 70 [seniors] walk out without a fighting chance so I came in the next day – it was kind of close to the new semester in the middle of the year. The report cards had just been sent out and I remember making a split decision that evening that if my kids would go with me on this we'd start [the ERWC materials] the next day. So I came into the class and I explained I was absent the day before because I was at this conference about 12th graders who aren't prepared for college and college folks are really worried [because 50% of incoming CSU Freshmen end up in remedial English and/or Math]. So I said, 'we need to help you learn how to write and they want to implement this next year but I think we should do it this year. Do you agree that you need help with writing?' And they all [said], 'yeah, we hate writing, we're scared of writing, it sucks' and I said, 'that means we're cramming six essays between now and the end of the year,' and they were okay with that. So I think they just knew that ...going into college they needed a little more of a fighting chance.” (AG, Alameda)

Changes Teachers Have Seen in Students' Writing

“After using the ERWC for a semester my students now know how to go into a situation like the EPT and write successfully, so I feel really good about that and many of them are going to college.” (RFS, Lake County)

“The nice thing about the ERWC readings is that most of them weren't more than 3 pages, so [students] could grasp the ideas. Many of my seniors have never written an essay, so just to get these guys to write was great. Are they writing a perfect essay? No. Can they write to an EPT-like prompt now? Yes. Will they pick up a newspaper and read? I don't know, but *for those who are going on to a community college*, I think they're on the road and so at least when their college instructor assigns them something, they're not going to go – what is this? ...I know these kids have made huge leaps. They're not necessarily where I would want a college prep class to be but at least now they'll read.” (CB, Bakersfield)

Changes Teachers Reported Seeing in Their Students' Attitudes and Self-Conceptions

As students' writing shifted, so did their thinking. Teachers characterized some students as being better able to think “objectively,” and to “consider other people's points of view.” They also saw students beginning to reflect metacognitively about their own strengths and weaknesses as readers and writers, gaining self-awareness about what they needed to develop. While many of these shifts were of a more internal nature, some teachers also reported seeing shifts of a broader kind; they saw students thinking more about the communities they live in and considering more deeply the things they were reading. When students began to see reading and writing as less daunting (because they were learning how to get into a text and dig around, not be scared off by it), some began for the first time to consider going to college. Teachers additionally reported seeing a positive shift in students' sense of themselves as readers, writers and thinkers. Students “claimed ownership of their own ability,” and one teacher reported seeing how a student's sense of ability to succeed academically helped one young woman who had not previously been college-bound reconsider her options, apply to a 4-year school, and get into CSU Northridge.

(Teachers' Perceptions of) Students' Changing Self-Conceptions and Self-Confidence

“...Especially in a college prep class, the lower 50%, to see them claim ownership of their own ability is one of the challenges that I was working for them to accomplish and they accomplished it. [I am] so proud of them.” (JD, Bakersfield)

“[Students] have [gained] tremendous confidence and self-esteem, and one young lady – at the beginning of the year she wasn't going to go to college and midway through the year there were these [ERWC] packets and she experienced some real success academically with these materials. She applied to CSU Northridge, which she never would have done if she hadn't had that success with the ERWC curriculum.” (JD, Bakersfield)

Changes Teachers Have Been Seeing for English Language Learners

“I think the English language learners did very well. I think it helped them tremendously because they probably should not be in a college prep class just because their skills are lower than they should be, but they worked hard at it and survived.” (PD, Santa Rosa)