Facilitating Reading and Writing in Academic Classrooms
Workshop
November 19, 2005

While most teachers were busy on the Saturday before Thanksgiving getting a jump on Holiday shopping, 14 teachers from 4 elementary schools in Portsmouth used 6 hours of their precious weekend time to industriously hone their language arts instructional skills. Led by ODU Reading Professor and nationally known Reading Consultant, Dr. Ray F. Morgan and Portsmouth Public Schools’ Director of Reading and English Education, Dr. Helen Taylor, the November 19th workshop, held at the Webb Center on the Old Dominion University campus, focused on presenting teachers with strategies to teach reading and writing in the content areas. Drs. Morgan and Taylor presented 14 strategies to help teachers efficiently “multi-task” by teaching reading and writing skills while using the core area subject content. Workshop participants learned that they could not only develop better readers and writers but could facilitate students learning content information at a deeper level for longer-term retention.

Dr. Morgan stressed that students must be actively involved in the learning process in order for learning to become meaningful and personal. As expected, Dr. Morgan then actively involved workshop participants in learning the strategies he presented. Teachers used “Anticipation Guides” to prepare for reading, wrote “Possible Sentences” to predict unfamiliar vocabulary, practiced “Two-Column” notetaking, completed a “Modified Cloze” paragraph and “Insert”ed symbols during individual reading to actively analyze content while reading. Participants practiced these strategies in individual, small group and teacher-led exercises as Dr. Morgan demonstrated that cooperative learning techniques further encourage students to participate in their own learning processes.

The keystone strategy presented during the workshop was the PAR framework for content area lessons. The PAR framework uses 3 phases: Preparation, Assistance and Reflection. During the Preparation phase, teachers determine and build student background. In the Assistance phase, teachers use strategies that develop comprehension and help students read with purpose. Strategies in the Reflection phase further determine material comprehension by allowing students to critically analyze and extend their reading. All of the strategies presented during the workshop could be used during one or more of the PAR framework phases. Best of all, Dr. Morgan showed teachers how 10 of the 14 strategies could be implemented with less than 5 minutes of teacher preparation time!

Schools sending workshop participants included Brighton Elementary, Churchland Academy Elementary, James Hurst Elementary and Lakeview Elementary. As with the NASA workshop, teachers will be asked to conduct a follow-up session with their grade level peers to disseminate the strategies presented during the workshop. Teachers will also participate in a follow-up workshop session sometime in February or March to discuss their actual classroom experiences while implementing these reading strategies in the content areas.