

Teaching Tips/Notes



Using the RAFT as a Collaborative Teaching Technique

Introduction

Working collaboratively within the college classroom setting may be helpful with the retention, understanding, and engagement of academic materials. Often in college classrooms, lessons are based purely on lecture without much space for inquiry, collaboration, and creativity. The RAFT technique, which stands for role, audience, format, and task, can serve as an interactive and cooperative teaching technique.

RAFT is a system for making sure that students understand their role as a writer, their audience, the format of their work, and the expected content. These key ingredients are included in every writing assignment: R: Role of a writer, A: Audience, F: Format, T: Topic and strong verb. (Santa, 1988, p.120).

The RAFT technique can be adapted to fit the needs of any subject area to encourage discussion about subject matter, while providing an opportunity for students to view the subject from various perspectives. The RAFT technique works especially well with controversial topics. Students gain communication, public speaking, and listening skills through the activity, while presenting a skit to the class, and listening and questioning classmate's skits. The RAFT technique reveals if students are literate in the subject matter by challenging students to physically create something with course content they are studying.

Procedure

An example of how the RAFT topic can be integrated into a controversial science based lesson: give students the directions to create a brief skit about biofuels using at least five vocabulary terms from class. Give students the option to choose a pre-formed role (scientist, community member, farmer) or allow them to make up their own, set the audience (town meeting), format (skit), and topic (What are biofuels? How are biofuels made? Make an argument for or against biofuels.). Time can also be included within the RAFT activity for skit preparation and presentation. By allowing students to choose their own role for the skit, they can take more ownership of their work and will likely be more engaged in the activity.

Assessment

The RAFT technique challenges students to return to course material and fully engage and comprehend the aspects of various topics in order to make a stand for or against something. Students can be given the opportunity to present their skit to the class, which increases communication skills, while learning from multiple perspectives as they listen to their classmate's skits. Teachers can use this activity as a participation grade or formal grade with a written rubric. For example, a scale of 0-4 can be implemented, with a 4 representing "advanced", a 3 for "correct", a 2 for "incomplete", a 1 for "incorrect", and a 0 for "off task". Teachers can use the RAFT as a summarizing strategy to formatively assess retention of course material. Another way to incorporate the RAFT technique into the classroom setting would be by using it as a written assignment on a test or quiz to gauge student understanding.

The RAFT technique allows students to take complex material, make an opinion, clearly articulate their opinion with scientifically supported facts and vocabulary, and view the issue from various perspectives in a real-world setting. Often, lessons in the college classroom are taught without an emphasis on the relevance or connections to future application. By relating classroom content to real life scenarios students are better able to see the importance and relevance of the topic.

The RAFT technique is an easy, no strategy to engage students and challenge them to critically think about a topic. Active classroom engagement enhances career skills such as communication, leadership, time management, and concise articulation of thoughts. All the skills utilized through active participation in the RAFT activity will prove to be greatly beneficial when students enter the workforce.

References

Santa, C.M. 1988. Content reading including study systems: reading, writing and studying across the curriculum. Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt.

Submitted by:

Catherine A. DiBenedetto and Victoria Willis
Clemson University, Clemson, SC