Institutionalizing Reading Apprenticeship® at RTC
By RAT Pack Leader, Michele Lesmeister

For the past two years, Reading Apprenticeship has been piloted in Adult Basic Education classes on campus and then last year in Certified Nursing Assistant, Legal Secretary and Civil Engineering Technology.

In addition, other classroom teachers interested in Reading Apprenticeship have attended trainings and tried out a few routines in their classrooms.

Through our classroom research, we have learned a lot, and some reoccurring points are listed below.

- Reading instruction housed in discipline-specific content is meaningful and helpful to students.
- Reading Apprenticeship routines show the greatest outcomes when they are regular and routine as classroom methodologies.
- The classroom discussions around reading and reading processes provides deep insights into the complexity of the texts that we are asking students to read as part of their coursework.
- Students appreciate the attention spent on helping them read.
- The classrooms in RA are fully engaged; students enjoy apprenticing each other.
- Something is different about the engagement in these classes that has changed the classroom dynamic – there is a new kind of collaboration around reading.

Truly, academic literacy presents many challenges for all of us, faculty and student alike. These challenges impede success on many levels and erode student confidence and, ultimately, their success. Most faculty have faced a classroom where students exhibit some of the following behaviors:

- Debate the value of reading
- Lack confidence about reading
- Present themselves as passive learners
- Appear to have limited knowledge of academic texts
- Have learned to not be accountable for their reading
- Spend a lot of energy covering up what they do not understand
- Have limited comprehension.

These behaviors are easily classified as students who are unmotivated learners, but that is very likely a superficial display of other underlying problems.
Many students are not in the habit of reading, let alone in the habit of devouring an academic text. The pedagogical dilemma becomes a professional dilemma of the issue: Do we ignore it as learned behavior or do we begin to unravel the behavior by engaging students in a discussion around their and our reading processes? Have we thought deeply about the reading assignments we make and why?

The Achieving the Dream Initiative and our Board of Trustees are interested in our involving more teachers in Reading Apprenticeship methodologies by expanding the initiative to more classrooms. These parties value the role that reading plays in student and faculty success. The hope is that faculty will self-select and begin to revisit how they approach their texts and that they ideally begin to use an apprenticeship model to promote greater understanding of texts in all their formats.

At RTC, we work on an apprenticeship model; we show our students our expertise. When apprenticeship is applied to our professional-technical texts and to teaching reading, then our students learn from our modeling and hands-on approach. As instructors, we are the field-specific experts in the classroom, the texts are of our choosing, and we possess these skills already; we just need to apprentice our students in them. This is what Reading Apprenticeship refers to as “making the invisible visible.”

Let’s figure out how we can work together to use some research-based routines to promote access, discussion and reading. I am available to work with faculty to determine one or two reading routines that will make sense for individual faculty member’s course context, content, and style. I will be available to create templates, model, mentor, and assist faculty in their efforts to bring reading to the forefront of our instructional methods. Instructors are invited to work with me on one or two routines. The goal is to turn reading into a more efficient and effective task. I, along with Chris Johnson and his staff, will help track the students’ progress through a variety of tools, surveys, and assessments.

Everyone is busy. The demands on our time are increasing. However, with subtle changes in your presentation of your current materials, there will be a big payoff for students and faculty alike:

1. Think about the reading assignments that you make for your students. Which types do they struggle with? Are their reading obstacles impacting test performance, safety, their ability to follow directions? Are their reading obstacles impacting your time or ability to teach content?
2. Email me at milesmeister@RTC.edu to set up a time to get connected.
3. Work with me to choose one or two routines to try; I have lots of ideas, templates, and energy to get you started.
4. Team up to support literacy instruction with your textbook.
5. Track your students’ progress with help from me and Chris Johnson’s Research Department.

The RAT Pack and I look forward to working with you to improve your students’ reading comprehension!

---

**Join the RATs!**

**RATs (Reading Apprenticeship Teachers and supporters)** is the RTC support group for those who want to use WestEd’s Reading Apprenticeship®. Become a RAT and learn how to help improve your students’ reading skills and comprehension. For more info about RA at RTC, scurry over to our RATs website/blog at [http://rtc-rats.org/](http://rtc-rats.org/)

Also visit our new RA/RATs LibGuide at [http://rtc.libguides.com/rats](http://rtc.libguides.com/rats)

The RAT Pack is the training and planning leadership team to help get you started. Contact one of them today for more info about RA or RATs:

- Debbie Crumb
- Jenna Pollock
- Michele Lesmeister, Team Leader

---

**Come to Michele’s RA/RATs workshop at the Faculty In-Service on Thursday Sept. 16 from 8:30—9:50 AM in J-302.**