Students are often faced with making decisions about which texts to read, study, and master. Sometimes they make these decisions out of necessity; at other times, they make these choices based on the teacher's presentation and testing methods.

In the end, the student has to figure out how to access the content in discipline-specific texts. There are some constants that we hear from faculty:

- Students are challenged by syntax and vocabulary.
- More of my students come from a second language background.
- Often the students lack the language skills in reading and writing to comprehend the material in a manner that allows them to transfer, extrapolate, or synthesize knowledge.

These are the exact reasons why Reading Apprenticeship® routines can help improve the access to the text's content, improve comprehension, create reading routine pathways for a collaborative and metacognitive conversations that spur learning.

An example of one classroom where students used metacognitive conversations to make meaning from a complex text is in Connie Berry smith's Dental Assistant class. One of their texts is Dental Radiography.

The text is packed with technical details about radiology as it pertains to the field of dentistry. I agreed to help the students learn Reading Apprenticeship® routines using this textbook.

Chapter one of the textbook is filled with the details of radiology history, inventions, inventors, terminology, and definitions. This information will appear on the course’s examinations as well as the national exams that the students take.

I read the chapter several times and

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talked to Connie about the level of detail that the students needed to be responsible for. Ultimately, I created the following assignment incorporating the Reading Apprenticeship® framework.

Task: Use the key terms presented in the textbox to create a sketch or schematic that shows the definitions, function, relationship, and interrelationship of the terms in a way that captures the essential knowledge of the chapter. The terms included: cathode ray; fluorescence; radiation; radiograph; radiograph, dental; radiographer, dental; radiography; radiography, dental; radiology; vacuum tube; X-radiation; and X-ray.

Initially, the students worked independently, then they collaborated using inquiry questions about the terms themselves, the relationships of terms, the stacking of information, how one invention led to another, etc. Soon the students were flipping through the chapter, chatting about how they “saw” the terms and concepts, and how to represent the information in a meaningful way that demonstrated the basic information presented in the chapter.

Once the sketches were completed (see page 1 for an example of a student sketch), the students presented their work on the chapter. Discussion and commentary followed.

It was fascinating to see how students learned from each others’ sketches and discussion about the topic and key terms. This was a fun way to open the students to learning the definition and the relationships among terms and facts in the chapter.

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**Ask a RAT**

I have to admit I’m skeptical about some of the Reading Apprenticeship® routines. Isn’t picture-drawing a waste of class time?

The activity described in this month’s article works on many levels. Many of us at RTC are familiar with Universal Design for Learning, which supports incorporating multiple learning styles into classroom activities. While there may be some debate about learning styles, helping students learn in more than one way will definitely help them master material.

Additionally, this activity requires students to synthesize and interact with knowledge, and then present the material in a different format. This is ultimately what we want students to do – understand material well enough to communicate and use it. Add in the personal and social dimensions of this activity and you have a winner.

This activity may look like “picture-drawing” on the surface, but it is a complex and excellent learning experience.

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**Join the RATs!**

RATs (Reading Apprenticeship Teachers and supporters) is the RTC support group for those using WestEd’s Reading Apprenticeship® (RA) to improve student reading.

For more info, visit our website and blog at [http://rtc-rats.org](http://rtc-rats.org) and our RA/RATs LibGuide at [http://libguides rtc edu rats](http://libguides rtc edu rats)

The RAT Pack is the training and planning leadership team to help get you started. Contact us:
- Debbie Crumb
- Jenna Pollock
- Michele Lesmeister, Team Leader

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**Reading Opens New Vistas**

"I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke in me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive.”

— Malcolm X