



skills beyond the basics to equip them for success in college and career.

How do educators face such adults with optimism and an eagerness to help improve specific reading skills so that these students can read and understand a variety of materials? Community and technical colleges are seeing a widening gap of readers—from students trying to get a General Education Diploma (GED) to under-employed college graduates who are trying to retrain for a sustainable wage-earning career. These individuals, often highly selective or technical readers, meet the broad-based coursework of a community college, but a reading learning curve exists. Students express their need to ramp up their reading skills to cover the extensive academic and technical reading assignments and to keep pace

is initially slow and reflective. I identify my own inquiries and thoughts from the text, grammatical structures, genre, the graphics and style of writing. My thinking aloud appears as questions or observations: "How do I understand that from the text? Where do I find out about that in the reading? Isn't that personification of the ocean, where is this leading me? This looks like foreshadowing; I need to see where it is going. That colon tells me a list or definition or example is coming."

When I model, I methodically work my way through the passage noting every-

tackle difficult texts with a toolkit of skills gained in a collaborative manner. Such apprenticeship models team-building for the workplace and develops their cognitive, personal, knowledge-building, and social skills for learning in the future. Thus, this is a case of building an active learning community around reading in a way that all can contribute and gain insight into their own and each other's reading processes, especially the ways in which they recognize and solve problems in their understanding of various texts.

Practice Makes Perfect

Like so many things in life, the key is practice. RA uses routines that support the four dimensions of the classroom and equal access is given to all students. In multi-level classrooms, faculty often struggle with how to approach the emerging readers. The modeling and scaffolding in RA allow all learners to gain reading skills and improved processes because the routines are repeated and the discussion revolves around making visible what may seem invisible. This brings all readers into a metacognitive conversation about how to make meaning from difficult text. When community and technical college faculty provide this type of access, it is a



- Students remark about their reading improvement; their assessment is supported by test data.
- Student persistence and investment in the RA classroom are excellent.
- Students are reading for longer periods of time, daily, and more difficult texts.
- Students are relying on RA to support their comprehension routines.
- Students are much more willing to take intellectual risks in a classroom alive with participation and inquiry.
- Reading is now a social and collaborative effort in my class.

Often, adult educators teach within the confines of the tested reading levels of the students. By applying the students' conceptual sophistication and intellectual maturity, and by thoughtfully

applying RA routines and scaffolding, I can cross such superficial boundaries; these initiatives have led to a much more engaged reading classroom. More importantly, my students are reading with

To learn more about Reading Apprenticeship, and WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative, visit www.wested.org/ReadingApprenticeship.

Michelle M. Meister in Los Angeles

is basic studies faculty at Renton Technical College. She may be contacted at mlesmeister@RTC.edu.