

Breaking the Code:

Q and A with Michele Lesmeister, Reading Apprenticeship Expert

By Michele Lesmeister

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WAESOL Educator: What makes RA different from other reading approaches?

Michele Lesmeister: The Reading Apprenticeship framework is based on four dimensions: social, personal, cognitive, and knowledge-building, which provide a foundation for helping turn over the responsibilities of reading text to students in a way that meets them at whatever skill level they have; it scaffolds them through metacognitive conversations to deconstruct their texts and reconstruct them to find meaning. The nuances of getting students to read and to have metacognitive conversations about the classroom texts are where the power of this approach lies. Rather than simply assigning reading and assessing it via quiz or summary discussions about key points, students in RA classrooms assume a code-breaking stance to make meaning and they have some social responsibilities for questioning and sharing their observations, challenges, and inquiry questions.

WE: How did you become so passionate about Reading Apprenticeship (RA)?

ML: I first learned about Reading Apprenticeship in April 2008 at the Strategies ATD Conference in Atlanta. I have

been searching for some methods of teaching reading to adult learners that piggy-backed off their existing skills since the late 1970s. I have tried so many methods for teaching reading; most did little to improve student reading.

WE: Why do you think RA has become so popular these days?

ML: The Reading Apprenticeship framework is popular because it effectively helps students engage their texts, and it gives them a sense of voice and equity around making meaning from their texts.

WE: How has your understanding of RA changed over time?

ML: When I first started working in Reading Apprenticeship, I mistook the reading routines for the real work of RA, when, in fact, the true aspect of a RA classroom is in the metacognitive engagement that students have with the texts via the instructor's careful, intentional, and embedded scaffolding and modeling. Every quarter that I work with my students, I improve my craft in RA.

WE: Renton Technical College has hosted three Reading Apprenticeship Conferences now. How do you think the latest conference compare to previous ones?

ML: The 3rd annual Metacognition and Mindfulness conference added some more presenters who are

practitioners in their fields. Also, faculty are sharing and collaborating in their work with texts like never before. Folks love the resources and the time to network and share. The presenters and participants are simply amazing and inspirational.

WE: What advice would you give new teachers?

ML:

Learn from the best practices and keep trying to learn about your craft from a position of empowering students to be learners.

Don't give up on RA if you have tried it once, and it was awkward. These methods require practice and there are protocols for each routine to help you learn the routines and from there, you will be able to tailor these for your classrooms. Learn how to incorporate Reading Apprenticeship into every subject matter you teach; it is a game-changer for students.

WE: How would you encourage seasoned teachers to become teacher trainers?

ML: WestEd/Strategic Literacy Initiative (<https://readingapprenticeship.org/professional-development/>) does trainings which allow faculty to become trainers. This is not a simple one course journey because reading instruction is complex, social, cultural, and requires understanding the theory behind how to set up and complete the classroom routines. In Washington, we have several trained RA leaders who collaborate with me to provide trainings statewide.

WE: In your experience, how is teacher training similar to, or different from, teaching students?

ML: Faculty tend to be more skeptical about RA than the students I encounter. I totally understand this because across our institutions, faculty have “initiative fatigue” and there seems to be a lack of focus on one initiative.

WE: What are you excited about on the horizon?

ML: I am so excited to plan and arrange the 4th Annual Metacognition and Mindfulness conference. We have the dates March 9 and 10, 2018. The bringing together of educators and administrators is an important collaboration around the subject of reading.

WE: Tell us something unexpected about you.

ML: I have just finished the final page review and copy edits on my 5th edition of my textbook: Math Basics for the Healthcare Professional for Pearson Publishing.



Michele Lesmeister teaches College and Career Pathways classes at Renton Technical College in Renton, Washington. She has a BA in Linguistics and a Master's degree in Teaching English. Since 1990, she has focused on teaching adults transferable language skills in writing and reading. Michele is leading a college-wide and state initiative of institutionalizing Reading Apprenticeship. She works with other teachers and professionals to bring about the Metacognition & Mindfulness Reading Apprenticeship conference held in March at Renton Technical College. She has published two titles under Pearson Education: Math Basics for the Healthcare Professional(5th edition) and Writing Basics for the Healthcare Professional. Her passions include working with students to provide real-time routines for their learning needs to build their learning confidence. She loves growing her own vegetables and working in her gardens, cooking, reading, and traveling.