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An Instructional Framework to Support Content and Language Learning for ELLs: B-D-A

by Vicky Giouroukakis

Purpose

The before, during, and after (B-D-A) reading framework is a research-based instructional model that incorporates strategies and activities throughout the reading process to help students interact and learn with text by providing varying degrees of guidance on several levels. The instructional activities and strategies incorporated into lessons *before*, *during*, and *after* reading are essential to active and purposeful learning (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2014). B-D-A can thus be of special benefit to English language learners (ELLs) who need additional linguistic support as they try to anticipate, comprehend, and apply their textual understanding.

Before-reading activities help the teacher activate students' knowledge, stimulate interest, establish a purpose, and maintain direction. During-reading activities guide students in their search for meaning. After-reading activities deepen, reinforce, and extend learning. Below are some suggested B-D-A strategies and activities at each stage of the reading process that teachers can use to support their ELLs' learning.

Before Reading

The Thumb Ball activity replaces the typical "What do you know about ___" series of questions we may ask students at the beginning of a lesson to activate their background knowledge about and experience with a topic. The ball can be purchased on the website (www.thumbball.com) or created by using a beach ball or plastic ball available at stores like Party City. As the teacher, you write letters on the circles of the ball ranging from A to Z and that can also include diphthongs, such as Ch or Sh. You pass the ball around to students and ask them to look at the letter that their right thumb touches and to recite a word, beginning with that letter, relating to the topic of the day. If students are stuck, you can offer options: Allow them to use their left thumb letter, ask one classmate or the entire class for help, or eventually pass (Connolly & Giouroukakis, 2016). At the end of every response, you and your students discuss the meaning, relevance, and accuracy of the word selected.

You may want to frontload the activity by allowing your ELLs to brainstorm words ahead of time so that they can successfully recite them when their turn comes. After the activity, students can write one sentence, a few sentences, or longer text about the topic so that the activity is scaffolded for students on different language proficiency levels. Students can work in pairs or groups to brainstorm ideas related to the letter; you can also write questions on the ball—e.g., the five Ws and one H (the **What, When, Where, Who, Why, When, and How of journalism**) or literary-response questions (e.g., what is the setting of the story? Who is the main character in the story?)—that students can answer orally or in writing. The types of questions can be made distinctive for the different language proficiency levels and can range from basic recall questions for entering and emerging students to more abstract and complex questions, such as those that evaluate, to challenge your transitioning, expanding, and commanding students. You can work with students to review verbal and written responses for accuracy and correct vocabulary and grammar use as well.

During Reading

A strategy that could be used throughout the reading process but is especially useful for helping students make meaning of text during reading is the directed reading thinking activity (DRTA) (Giouroukakis & Connolly, 2013; McKenna & Robinson, 2002; Murdoch, 1998; Stauffer, 1969). This activity makes reading more manageable for students because it requires them to make predictions, read, stop, and reflect on their reading. You, the teacher, select a passage (informational or fiction) that you want students to read and comprehend. The amount of reading should be adjusted to fit the purpose and the difficulty of the text.

First, bold the vocabulary words in the passage and then list and define the words in simple terms above the passage. Then, number the sections and put a symbol of a stop sign at the end of each section. Last, include questions in the margin next to the text in which the answers can be found. Students scan the title, vocabulary words, and passage, and make predictions about what they think the passage is about and what ideas might be contained in the text. Then students read each section, stop, and respond to the margin questions. At the end of their reading, students think about and process the information. They practice their verbal skills by discussing whether their predictions were confirmed or not. For more information on the strategy, see Giouroukakis and Connolly (2013).

After Reading

At the end of a reading, you want to broaden students' knowledge by engaging them in a written-response activity. One-sentence summaries is a chunking strategy in which students read a text section by section and then write a one-sentence summary of each part; at the end, they have a few sentences that summarize the entire text. This strategy may also need to be scaffolded by demonstrating what a summary is and how to write one. Students compile their sentences, elaborate, add transitions, make edits, and produce a final coherent and accurate summary. Here, you can ask students to include their opinion of the text to develop their critical thinking skills.

As a final reading activity, you can use the Thumb Ball activity to review the topic, concepts, or language covered. Another variation is the ABC list, which requires students to think about a topic and jot down related words or phrases, each beginning with a separate letter of the alphabet (e.g., "A" for "Abolitionist" to describe Frederick Douglass). You can facilitate the activity by assigning ELLs fewer letters, providing examples, word starters, or visuals.

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