Discussion: Pre-reading Strategies

Assignment Resources

- Video: “Pre-reading Strategies (Teaching Example 4)”
- Video Focus Questions (provided below)

Discussion

Pre-reading helps students become familiar with the content and organization of a text before they begin reading. For English learners who may find the content of a textbook especially challenging, this is a particularly helpful strategy. In this activity, you will focus on teaching pre-reading skills in a lesson.

Review the video and think about the ways Mrs. Carrizo uses SDAIE strategies to help her students develop pre-reading skills. Review the additional information associated with the video focus questions.

Post a response to the following discussion prompts:

- How would you describe Mrs. Carrizo’s focus on pre-reading skills?

- Consider the lesson-specific information and background information on pre-reading skills. What suggestions would you give Mrs. Carrizo on how to directly teach one or two of these skills within the context of this lesson? Support your response with evidence from theory or research (either from this course or other sources) and your own personal experience.

Read your peers’ responses and reply as often as you’d like.
Focus Questions

This resource provides additional lesson-specific and background information for the following video:

- **Pre-reading Strategies (Teaching Example 4)**
  This teaching example focuses on a sixth grade language arts class for ELLs. Andrea Carrizo implements a number of strategies, such as adapting the text, teaching pre-reading skills, and using graphic organizers, in her lesson.

Several focus questions were identified for you to consider as you watched:

1. What should a teacher consider when adapting text?
2. How can a teacher help students develop pre-reading skills?
3. How do graphic organizers support students’ learning?
4. How can a teacher assess whether students have met the language and content objectives?

**1. What should a teacher consider when adapting text?**

**Lesson-Specific Information**
Mrs. Carrizo provides students with a chapter that she has rewritten from their social studies book. She mentions that she chose to rewrite the text to help students focus on the main idea and identify new vocabulary in context. It is important to note that her adapted text was constructed to meet her content and language objectives for the lesson, not merely to make the content easier for students. While the text could be considered “watered-down” curriculum, the objectives for the lesson will provide students with skills that they can (with the teacher’s support) begin to apply to their grade-level textbooks.

**Background Information**
While adapted text is one way to make content more accessible to English learners, it is important to note that the practice is not without its critics. Some argue that simplifying text affects the text’s coherence, and that authentic text structures provide more cues for reading comprehension (see Young, 1999, for an overview of these studies). Others argue that consistent use of simplified text leads teachers to underestimate the comprehension abilities of ELLs (Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, & Demel, 1988). Bernhardt (1984) argues that simplified texts may be easier to teach, but they do not focus on the comprehension processes. This is an important point because ELLs must develop the comprehension skills necessary for success in mainstream academic classrooms, with grade-level materials.

Despite these criticisms, there are times when a teacher may feel that the instructional
needs of students are best met with adapted or modified text.

**Suggestions for Rewriting Texts**
The following are suggestions for rewriting texts (Richard-Amato & Snow, 1992).

- **Simplification**: Reduce the linguistic complexity of the sentences to make the text more accessible. This may take the form of simplifying the grammatical structure, or eliminating unfamiliar vocabulary not essential to the main point of the text. Note that this will not assist students in attaining the reading skills necessary to work with grade-level reading materials, although it may make the content more comprehensible, especially for beginning English learners.

- **Expansion of ideas**: With this approach, the rewritten text contains additional information to help students understand the concepts. For example, the rewritten text might contain an example of a given concept that is more explicit than the original text. This approach might be one step toward helping students use context to figure out vocabulary words or increase comprehension; these skills can, with the assistance of the teacher, be transferred to more difficult reading materials.

- **Direct definition**: This is a more direct approach to providing vocabulary support. In this method, a definition of the word is inserted into the text itself, either as a separate sentence or embedded within the sentence where the word appears. In the video, Mrs. Carrizo demonstrates this approach.

For teachers who prefer to work with authentic grade-level texts, there are other alternatives for making the curriculum more accessible to English learners.

**Alternative Strategies for Adapted Text**
Following are alternatives to rewriting text in order to provide access to difficult content to English learners. These approaches are less time intensive for the teacher. Additionally, they support the students as they work with the complex text, helping them to become increasingly independent in working with grade-level materials.

**Graphic Organizers**

*Advance organizers*: Advance organizers are outlines or visual depictions that provide a method for students to identify and record the key concepts in the reading. An advance organizer is a visual tool to help learners understand relationships among key concepts and vocabulary that may be difficult to grasp. These types of organizers are especially useful in teaching and learning for ELLs because they provide a visual aspect to oral and written information, and provide students with a visual method to organize information. Advance organizers can be used to guide students’ reading. When using any kind of advance organizer, students can be asked to...
complete the organizer as they read, and their completed organizer can be used as a study tool or in preparation for writing. Advance organizers help students focus on the key information in a text.

Outlines: Outlines can be helpful in summarizing and organizing important points in the text. The teacher can provide outlines with varying amounts of structure. For example, for students who need substantial support, the outline could provide the big ideas indicated by roman numerals and students could be asked to fill in the supporting details. For more advanced students, a blank outline structure could be provided. As students become more proficient with language and academic content, the outline structure can be gradually lifted by the teacher.

Visual depictions: Charts, graphs, maps, photographs, and timelines can all be used to provide English learners with access to text. These tools help students visualize the information they are learning and can help students organize, discuss, and recall their learning.

Selecting Key Passages: To help students delve into the important concepts of the unit, teachers might consider selecting key passages from the reading for students to focus on. By focusing on shorter passages, teachers reduce the chance of students becoming overwhelmed and frustrated. Students can spend more time on the concepts presented in the material and focus on ensuring that students have truly understood and grappled with the key learning points. As students gain in proficiency, longer passages can be selected.

Demonstrations: Before assigning students a text to read, the teacher can provide a demonstration to help bring meaning to the text. The demonstration can take the form of discussing realia (visual examples) provided by the teacher, watching a video on the topic, or providing a demonstration of a science or social studies concept. These activities give students background knowledge, which helps them make sense of the text.

Using a Range of Reading Strategies: Depending on the difficulty and instructional goals of the text, consider the options for completing the reading.
Students might read in pairs that are carefully selected so that one can provide support to the other. Alternatively, students might practice self-assistance techniques, such as noting difficult words or concepts, then asking questions of peers or the teacher, practicing their developing skills on increasingly longer pieces of text.


2. How can a teacher help students develop pre-reading skills?

**Lesson-Specific Information**
In the following excerpt of the video, Mrs. Carrizo engages her students in a short pre-reading activity before asking them to read the text. She walks them through the text, pointing out the focus questions, section titles, and maps. Although the time she spends on this activity is brief, it shows the students how to get information about the material they are about to read.

*Andrea Carrizo (classroom):* What does pre-read mean? Share your ideas with your shoulder partner.

*Andrea Carrizo (voiceover):* I used think-pair-share to give them time to think. They think on their own, and then they share it with a partner so they’re able to practice speaking it. And they feel comfortable speaking with one other person.

*Andrea Carrizo (classroom):* Let’s share out. What does pre-read mean?

*Student:* Pre-read means like before reading.

*Andrea Carrizo (classroom):* How many of you were thinking before reading? OK, that’s right. Pre-read means before you read. First thing we’re going to pre-read is the focus question. When you pre-read, you also look at pictures. This is a map of a continent that I’m sure you’ve seen before. We’ll turn the page. And the last paragraph we’re going to read is called...?

*Andrea Carrizo and students:* Big Deal.

**Background Information**
Pre-reading helps students become familiar with the content and organization of a text before they begin reading. In teaching pre-reading skills, teachers help students learn...
that elements such as focus questions, visuals, bold words, and summaries are organizational tools that can assist with comprehension. In reviewing these elements before reading, students get a mental map of the material they are about to read. This is a particularly helpful strategy for English learners, who may find the content of a textbook especially challenging.

Pre-reading is a skill that should be taught through explicit instruction, as well as in-class modeling and practice. Additionally, the benefits of pre-reading should be explained, so that it is not viewed by students as yet an additional step in the arduous process of making sense of a text.

Suggestions for Teaching Pre-reading Skills

The following suggestions can be adapted for teaching students how to pre-read text (Snow & Brinton, 1997, p. 62).

1. **Read the chapter title:** Titles provide information about the topic of the chapter.
2. **Read the chapter subtitle (if included):** The subtitle provides specific information about the focus of the section of the chapter.
3. **Read any focus questions:** These questions indicate the important points in the chapter and can help to guide reading.
4. **Read the chapter introduction or the first paragraph:** This gives an idea of the general focus of the chapter.
5. **Read each boldface subheading:** These give a sense of the focus of the different parts of the chapter sections.
6. **Read the topic sentence of each paragraph:** The first sentence often gives the main idea of the paragraph. Be aware that the topic sentence isn’t always the first one, so you may have to read others in the paragraph to find it.
7. **Look over any typographical aids:** Words in italics or bold often indicate vocabulary and concepts that are important to the chapter. Sometimes the meaning of the words or explanation of the concept is nearby.
8. **Look over any other visual aids:** Note any material that is presented in list form, as a graph, chart, diagram, or map. These are clues to what is important in the chapter.
9. **Read the last paragraph or summary:** The last paragraph gives a summary of the chapter and revisits the important ideas.
10. **Read end of chapter material quickly:** If there are study questions or a vocabulary list, read through them so that you know what you’ll need to learn from the chapter.
3. How do graphic organizers support students’ learning?

Lesson-Specific Information
In this lesson, Mrs. Carrizo uses a “tree map,” a type of graphic organizer, to help students understand the concept of main idea and supporting details. Graphic organizers are schematic representations of information that assist students in understanding, organizing, and interpreting content knowledge. Such organizers include Venn diagrams, timelines, word webs, thinking maps, story or text structure maps, as well as many others.

Background Information
For English learners, graphic organizers are especially useful because the schematic representation helps them identify and organize key concepts and the relationships between them. Additionally, graphic organizers provide learners with visual cues to supplement content in a textbook or lecture that is complex or difficult to understand (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 1999). During reading activities, such as the one in Mrs. Carrizo’s lesson, graphic organizers help students focus their attention, organize their notes, and understand the structure of the text.

Benefits of Using Graphic Organizers with ELLs
Graphic organizers support ELLs by:

- **Organizing prior knowledge:** Before grappling with difficult content material, whether in a textbook, lecture, or group project, students can use graphic organizers to record their prior knowledge about a topic. This helps students see how the new information relates to what they already know. Students can also add new information to these original graphic organizers, enabling them to chart their own learning.

- **Providing visual means to represent and help students remember and understand content knowledge during a lesson:** As students work through difficult or complex material, a graphic organizer can help them focus on the key content. Additionally, an organizer can help students see the relationships between the concepts they are learning and keep the information organized for future activities. At the end of a unit, the organizer can stand as a summary of the main points of the lesson, making it a useful tool for studying, reflecting, or organizing written or oral presentations.

- **Focusing thoughts and reactions:** After studying a topic or text, students can record their thoughts and reactions to the material on a graphic organizer. This gives students the opportunity to explore their thinking either instead of or in preparation for a more formal written or oral response to the material.

(Adapted from Snow & Brinton, 1997)
Graphic organizers can help students in understanding, organizing, and interpreting content knowledge. Here are four examples of graphic organizers that you can use:

1. A **hierarchy** organizer is a good way to illustrate the superordinate and subordinate relationships among a group of items or set of information.

2. **Venn diagrams** are a useful way to illustrate the common and unique features of two different items. The area of intersection of the circles shows the characteristics common to both items.

3. **Cycle diagrams** can be used to show the relationship between a cyclical series of events. Each time the series repeats, the outcome is the same.

4. A **chain of events** organizer shows the stages or steps in a process. It illustrates how one step or event leads to another, resulting in a final outcome.

**4. How can a teacher assess whether students have met the language and content objectives?**

**Lesson-Specific Information**
To close her lesson, Mrs. Carrizo asks students to do a think-pair-share to review what they had learned that day as an informal assessment of group learning. After the students have had an opportunity to share, Mrs. Carrizo asks them to share their partners’ comments. This gives Mrs. Carrizo an idea of how the students have progressed toward her language and content objectives. From the student responses, it appears that students learned about early man (the content objective) and about main ideas and supporting details (her language objective). This information will assist Mrs. Carrizo in planning future lessons that will build on both her language and content objectives.

**Background Information**
Assessment is a crucial part of any lesson, as it provides the teacher with information about the extent to which students have acquired the knowledge in the lesson’s objectives. This information is invaluable in providing feedback to students to clarify misconceptions and in planning future lessons. Additionally, assessments allow students to appraise their own understanding and monitor their own learning. Many educators distinguish between assessment and evaluation. Assessment refers to gathering information about students’ learning, while evaluation involves making judgments about student learning (McLaughlin & Vogt, 1996). Assessment occurs during and after a lesson to determine the extent to which students are learning content. Periodic assessments during and after a lesson can eventually lead to evaluations of a student’s progress toward the teacher’s learning objectives.

Often, assessments are better indicators of language proficiency than content knowledge because English learners may have difficulty expressing what they know in
English. Teachers should consider their assessments carefully and be creative in adapting or developing assessments to best capture content knowledge.

Assessments can be administered to individuals or a group. Individual assessments give more detailed information about how each student is performing, while group assessments provide insight into the community knowledge of the class.

**Attributes of Appropriate Assessment**
The following attributes of appropriate assessment may be helpful in designing appropriate measures for ELLs (adapted from Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2002):

- Both content knowledge and language proficiency are considered.
- The teacher is clear about the purpose of the assessment (e.g., whether the assessment will provide information about verbal or writing skills, language proficiency, or content knowledge).
- A variety of techniques are used to measure content knowledge and skills.
- The assessment involves learning processes that are familiar to students.
- Assessments incorporate familiar classroom materials.
References


