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Continuum of Reading Activities: An In-Depth Look

By Pamela Luft

Step 1: Teacher-Led Read-/Sign-/Think-Alouds

Teachers present the text in their students' chosen language and communication mode and model targeted reading skills. When doing so, they ensure students have visual access to the text either through use of a big book or by using a classroom projection system. Teachers read aloud in spoken English or with a visual cueing system, or they can read by "signing aloud" in American Sign Language (ASL). Teachers may pause frequently, modeling how to use phonics or word families to make informed guesses to decode words. They present, explain, and demonstrate a variety of word- and phrase-level reading strategies that support comprehension of connected text (Fisher et al., 2011).

Teachers also model comprehension-checking strategies, periodically stopping, asking questions about word and passage meanings, and noting how their comprehension aligns with text comprehension up to this point. Teachers describe their own decision making using "think-aloud strategies." This has been shown to be effective with deaf and hard of hearing middle school students, including those with disabilities. Fisher et al. (2011) reported a statistically significant difference and large effect size in the use of think-alouds. They also increased teachers' awareness of students' use of reading strategies.

Step 2: Shared Reading/Signing

Teachers engage students through instructional bridging. They ask students to share their own think-aloud and decision-making processes and to give reasons for their choices. Individual students volunteer to read and demonstrate their read-/sign-/think-aloud skills. Rather than rely solely on volunteers, teachers may wish to call on students, who can ask for class help if unsure. Another strategy: fake mistakes! Teachers' "mistakes" are often extremely motivating in soliciting enthusiastic student "corrections," including from those who are otherwise very shy.

The shared reading classroom discussions provide further interaction experiences for students, reinforcing skills in providing details and abstract explanations of their strategies and rationales for decision-making and cognitive strategy

choice. These expand their linguistic abilities to use of increasingly complex syntactic relationships and semantic elements and simultaneously support advanced reading skill acquisition and refinement.

Step 3: Guided Reading

This step utilizes the Directed Reading Thinking Activity, also called DRTA (Stauffer, 1969; Stahl, 2008). Teachers divide a piece of connected text into segments based on the students' abilities. The teacher shows students the title and asks questions to prompt a discussion of experiential and text-based background knowledge. This increases students use of background experiences and related context to support word recognition and meaningful comprehension (Kyle & Cain, 2015; Marschark & Wauters, 2008; Schirmer, 2003; Schirmer et al., 2004). Teachers emphasize application of experiences and skills for comprehending the text to support students' increasing confidence; they do not review vocabulary.

After a conceptually focused introduction, students make a prediction about the book. Each student reads the first segment silently and then engages in class discussions related to their predictions of what will occur next. The teacher probes for further explanations and asks students to read aloud their evidence. Teachers do not ask comprehension questions; instead, they use the discussions to probe, scaffold, and support comprehension.

Step 4: Independent Reading

This is the ultimate goal. Students select materials and read across a range of genres, using their cognitive and linguistic resources to problem solve any comprehension challenges. Teachers support this process through the use of whole class reading selections, literature journals, literature circles, and reading workshops (Schleper, 2006; Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Peer and teacher feedback can help to verify individual comprehension and interpretations and offer opportunities to extend perspectives and insights. If needed, teachers provide individual attention and intervention to specific students or small groups. Teacher conferencing monitors and supports students' skill refinement.

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