

7-1-1987

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Recommended Citation

Saikey, E. H., & Cagney, M. A. (1987). Integrating Reading and Writing: The DRWA. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 27 (4). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol27/iss4/2

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INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING: THE DRWA

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Numerous studies show that reading and writing are inter-related processes (Doctorow, Wittrock, and Marks, 1978; Loban, 1963; Nagle, 1972; Taylor and Berkowitz, 1980). It is noteworthy that most of these studies involved expository reading materials. Thus, content area lessons offer a splendid opportunity to integrate these two skills.

Apparently, however, the nature and extent of specific transfer between instruction in reading and instruction in writing depend somewhat on the focus of instruction. When writing exercises are used specifically to enhance reading comprehension, significant gains result. On the other hand, when writing activities are used primarily to develop writing skills, reading comprehension is not significantly improved (Stotsky, 1983).

Similarly, the 1981 report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that while students of all ages were able to comprehend reading passages at varied levels, they appeared to have difficulty elaborating or explaining their ideas in writing. Moreover, few 17-year-olds recalled every having been taught strategies for composing (NAEP, 1981).

Although dismaying, such reports are not completely surprising. Graves (1978) noted that most elementary teachers emphasize the mechanics of writing rather than the teaching of composition. At the secondary level, Applebee (1981) found that only four percent of the social science and science teachers at junior and senior high school levels provide students with opportunities to write. Amazingly, not more than 10% of the English teachers arrange for such experiences.

Despite these dismal statistics, current research is beginning to identify effective ways for integrating the

teaching of reading and writing. And, because a great deal of the expository writing that is required of students is often done under pressure of class or test conditions, Teidt, Bruemmer, Lane, Stelwagon, Watanabe, and Williams (1983) assert that the skill must become automatic. In other words, students should be taught to master basic structures for such composition so that they can concentrate most of their efforts on content rather than format.

The Directed Reading-Writing Activity (DRWA) described in this article provides a framework that will help them write about the information acquired through reading.

Directed Reading-Writing Acitivity

Active learners are generally more analytical and responsive than passive learners. A DRWA is an instructional approach that is designed to become a student's self-guided search for answers and ideas.

A DRWA provides the format for combining the thinking processes involved in reading and writing. It incorporates aspects of Wittrock's generative reading comprehension model (1983) in which students are active learners, responsible for relating the text to their experiential backgrounds and establishing purposes for reading.

However, as a model, the DRWA extends the thought processes associated with reading comprehension into effective writing. And, it brings together into an integrated framework instructional practices and exercises that are surely familiar, though in isolated contexts, to teachers.

As we have developed it with practicing teachers among our graduate students during the past several years, a DRWA leads logically to more complete understanding of text. In a DRWA, reading leads immediately to writing, an integration which nurtures simultaneous improvement in reading comprehension. Writing enables readers to organize and clarify their thoughts; at the same time it guides them directly into what is being read during the activity.

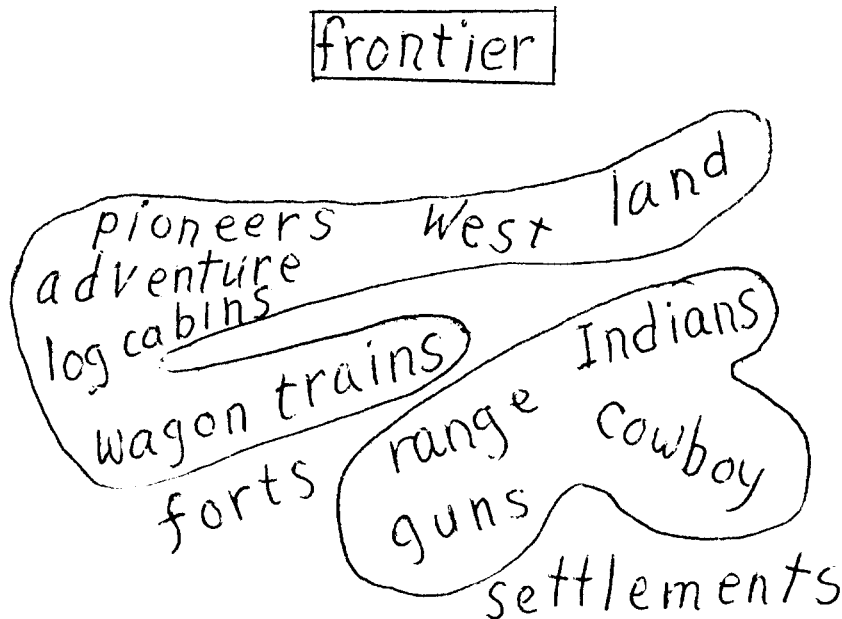
The DRWA is composed of three major steps: (1) preparation, (2) involvement, and (3) reaction. At each step, writing exercises ensure that students become active comprehenders. In the preparation stage, students use vocabulary and conventions of print to write purpose-setting statements

and questions. During involvement, students interact with the passage by writing answers to questions, completing outlines and summarizing. Finally, in the reaction stage, students monitor their own thought processes by evaluating the written activities they completed during all three steps of the DRWA.

Preparation

During the preparatory stage, vocabulary is developed in a way that leads students to write purpose-setting questions that stimulate active reading. For instance, an approach such as "clustering" combines reading and writing quite readily. Write the topic of the selection to be read on the chalkboard and enclose it in a rectangle. Ask the students for words or phrases which the topic suggests to them. Record them underneath the rectangle.

After a sufficient number of words and phrases have been recorded, ask students to make associations among them. Enclose those words which students identify as being related. See Figure 1, below.



Then instruct the class to use two or more words within a cluster as stimuli for writing every statement or question that will serve as a purpose for reading. For example, the words "pioneer" and "west" can be used to formulate "Why did the pioneers move west?" and "adventure" and "wagon train" might produce "What kind of adventures were encountered when traveling in wagon trains?"

Or, again as preparation, provide key vocabulary from the selection to be read and direct your students, in small groups, to categorize the words or phrases under appropriate headings. After such categorization, ask students to write their own purpose-setting questions based on perceived relationships among words in a specific category. After the questions are composed, the selection can be read silently. In a story relating to pioneers, for instance, "forts," "settlements," "log cabins," and "sod houses" might be classified as shelters and used to formulate the question, "Why did some pioneers live in log cabins and others live in sod houses?"

At other times, introductions, headings, summaries, and graphic aids from the text selection can serve as stimuli for writing purpose-setting statements and questions about the topic.

In all instances, the questions which individual students have written should be shared orally and some should be written on the chalkboard. However cursory and preliminary such writing may seem, when it is shared orally, backgrounds are extended and purposes are refined or generated within individual members of the class.

Because prior knowledge is required for processing ideas through language, the preparation stage in DRWA is essential. When students pose their own questions, as in the examples just given, reading becomes a search for ideas and answers.

Involvement

The involvement stage of a DRWA helps students become active comprehenders. Questions that were formulated and recorded during the preparation stage can guide students in their search for meaning in the selection at hand. As they progress through the selection, students are encouraged to write responses to their questions. Such written response to the text and to their own questions and statements helps clarify their thoughts, reinforce important facts, and formu-

late new questions. Understanding is deepened and recall strengthened.

Another involvement activity utilizes words categorized in step one. Often these words can serve as a basis for a partial outline which the students complete as they read the selection, thus facilitating understanding and recall. Initially, students can copy directly from the reading selection to complete the outline. Eventually, a summary can be composed based on the kind of outlining suggested by Cunningham, Moore, et al., (1983).

Figure 2: Example of partial outline

I. Moving West of the Appalachians

A. _____

1. young

2. white

3. poor

B. Reasons for moving

1. _____

2. _____

3. improve lives

4. _____

C. Transportation

1. raft

2. _____

3. _____

D. Conflicts

1. Tippecanoe

2. _____

3. Andrew Jackson

a. Creeks

b. _____

c. elected president

E. Indian Reservation Act

(America Past and Present, Schreiber, et. al., Scott
Foresman and Co., 1983)

A third involvement activity is the writing of a topic sentence summary. Before asking students to read a selection, determine which paragraphs contain topic sentences. Note their specific location on a worksheet that provides space in which to write each topic sentence. When the reading is completed, share and discuss students' compilations of topic sentences. Findings from several studies

reveal that such writing enhances reading comprehension (Stotsky, 1982).

As a variation of this activity, students may write an original one-sentence summary after each paragraph. Research involving sixth graders has shown that this strategy promotes greater comprehension than the writing of a one-sentence summary for an entire selection or for writing nothing at all (Doctorow, Wittrock, and Marks, 1978). Interestingly, low ability readers in this study improved even more than high ability readers.

Summarizing, writing responses to self-generated questions, and outlining--each involves students in the learning process. This involvement helps develop factual and inferential comprehension skills (Pearson and Johnson, 1978; Stotsky 1982). Thus, the second state of a DRWA is a springboard to higher levels of comprehension.

Reaction

The third step in a DRWA helps students monitor their own thought processes and to develop strategies that improve comprehension and creation of written material. Evaluating one's original purpose-setting questions is a reaction activity that can promote skill in recognizing main ideas in the reading selection and list them in sentence form on the chalkboard. Ask "Which of your questions could be answered by these sentences?" In this way students can distinguish between important and unimportant questions.

Examine some of the remaining questions to determine whether they refer to relevant or irrelevant details. Ask students to explain decisions about relevancy so that they may become cognizant of their own thinking strategies. Interject questions pertaining to important information overlooked by the students.

Another reaction activity focuses on comparing outlines developed by students during the involvement stage with a model provided by the teacher. Project specific outlines on an overhead projector and direct students' attention to specific points being discussed. If major disagreements arise, refer students to supporting sections of the text and read them aloud. Through subsequent discussion, highlight the thinking processes involved in outlining.

Precis writing is still another potential reaction activity. This type of writing involves selecting and paraphrasing ideas in order to write a concise abridgement of a reading selection. One of the topic sentence summaries completed by a student during the involvement stage can be duplicated and used to teach precis writing. Words that can be replaced can be underlined and students asked to suggest suitable synonyms.

At the same time, help students to realize that not all words can be replaced. For example, in the sentence "A temperate climate and fertile soil provide the United States with abundant crops," most, but not all, of the words can be replaced. A paraphrased version might read "Moderate weather and rich earth supply plenty of food for the United States." Such vocabulary discussion will enable students to paraphrase topic sentences into a precis more easily. According to Bretzing and Kulhavy (1979), better comprehension results when students make a greater cognitive effort and process information more deeply by using their own words to elaborate on the text and paraphrase its important lines.

Once you understand the logic of a DRWA and have internalized its basic framework as a model of processing information, classroom application is limited only by your own imagination in coming up with a variety of techniques already familiar to you in the teaching of the language arts generally.

Summary

Current research in reading and writing increasingly recognizes the importance of the interrelationships of these two skills (Squire, 1983). A Directed Reading-Writing Activity as outlined in this article offers a practical way of integrating instruction in writing and in reading. At each of the three stages, preparation, involvement, and reaction, students participate in exercises that enhance both comprehension and composition.

In preparation students generate purpose-setting questions. The involvement step is a self-guided search for meaning. During reaction, students become acquainted with strategies for monitoring their own thought processes as they read and write. Since a mutually supportive relationship

exists between reading and writing, students benefit from the combined use of these two skills.

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