Teaching the Text Backwards
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The three principles that have been identified from current theory and practice in ESOL are: to increase comprehensibility, increase interaction, and increase thinking and study skills. Content area teachers can implement these important principles in their instruction of mixed groups of linguistic minority and mainstream students. This is especially useful for teachers in the upper elementary, middle, and high school grades where so much knowledge is derived from text-based resources. One way to make sure that the principles are implemented is through a technique called, 'Teach the Text Backwards'.

The traditional teaching sequence found in most classrooms is as follows:
- Read the text
- Answer the study questions at the end of the chapter
- Discuss the material in class
- Do selected applications based on the material

Although this sequence has been used repeatedly with mainstream students and has proven successful for many, it is very difficult for ELLs. This is because language learners read English with difficulty and may not have the cultural or background knowledge necessary to understand the text in the same way as their native speaker peers (for whom the text was actually written). Therefore it is suggested by Jameson (1999) that teachers ‘Teach the Text Backwards’.

The Teach the Text Backwards sequence is as follows:
- Do selected applications based on the content material
- Discuss the material in class
- Answer the study questions at the end of the chapter
- Read the text

It is important to start by doing something that applies the materials to be learned in a concrete, real-life way. The ‘applications’ or ‘extensions’ sections at the end of text chapters or in the teacher’s guide are often good resources for finding activities that can be used successfully with ELLs who thrive on hands-on interaction with course content. By using applications, it is possible to increase the comprehensibility of the new content area material. As an example, in a science course a scheduled field trip to a farm could take place early in a unit on agriculture, or in a social studies class preparing a family history map could be done before starting a unit on immigration.

Next, discussing the application and related concepts in class helps to introduce key vocabulary and information. Teachers should ask students what happened, why, what would happen if, and many other types of questions. Through
student-teacher and student-student interaction in this phase of instruction, new vocabulary and phrases are connected to a real-life meaning. Oral language is often easier than textbook language for ELLs to comprehend and the discussion of a concrete application activity that they have participated in helps to tie new concepts together while shoring up background knowledge, providing schema, and modeling the thinking skills essential to an understanding of the content unit. All three of the important principles of increasing comprehensibility, increasing interaction, and increasing thinking and study skills are applied in this phase.

**Reviewing** the study questions at the end of the chapter in order for learners to identify main ideas and set a purpose for reading are part of the next phase of instruction. A preview of the chapter can be done by having students look at the pictures and diagrams present. The teacher or the students themselves may read the subheadings to show how the chapter is organized and where specific information can be found. These strategies increase comprehensibility as well as thinking and study skills.

Actually **reading** the text comprises the final phase of this technique. Teachers can divide or jigsaw the chapter in order to reduce the amount of text that each student reads while increasing understanding for key sections. It is essential to model study skills by pointing out graphic organizers and visuals that demonstrate key relationships in the content for students increased comprehensibility and thinking skills.

The Teach the Text Backwards sequence incorporates the three principles that have been found helpful for ELLs in learning language through content and it also aids other students who are native speakers but less skilled readers, or who learn best through less traditional teaching styles. This teaching technique can be carried over to other areas that do not necessarily involve text reading, such as watching a film, or listening to a lecture. It helps learners to develop a framework for understanding, interacting with, and applying new information in a new language.