Working With Mainstreamed Students

TEN TECHNIQUES FOR COMPREHENDING TEXTS

All teachers are responsible for ensuring that the content of their teaching is appropriate to the ages and backgrounds of their students. Literacy is an intrinsic part of focusing on, talking about, reading, and writing content.

The following myths about literacy no longer apply:

1. Literacy is a concern only in elementary schools;
2. Literacy is separate and distinct from teaching content;
3. Literacy in secondary schools can be addressed through remedial work alone;
4. Only a reading specialist should be concerned with literacy.

The following is a listing of ten techniques which all content teachers can use to help their students access texts and improve literacy.

1. Reverse Text Sequencing
   Before automatically assigning a reading passage or chapter, do selected applications/activities of the text topic in class; discuss the material with students, by introducing and expanding vocabulary items; assign selected questions for students to answer by skimming the text; and finally, have students read the text.

2. Text Skimming
   In order to help understand the passage or chapter, ask them to:
   a. Read the first sentence or paragraph carefully;
   b. Look at the beginning of each paragraph;
   c. Read a few words;
   d. Skip some paragraphs;
   e. Read the last paragraph carefully; and
   f. Look back for clarification, if necessary.

3. Reconstructing Text I
   Cut an excerpt from the text into paragraphs or sentences. Have students reconstruct the text in the right order and explain why they have chosen that order.

4. Reconstructing Text II
   Select a paragraph for dictation:
   a. Read it once at normal speed without pauses;
b. When completed, have students, in
groups, write down any words or
phrases they can recall and discuss them;
c. Read the text again at normal speed.
Have students write down anything
they can recall and they discuss it;
d. Repeat the process, reading the text
as many times as necessary; and
  e. Finally, distribute the original text
  for comparison.

5. Gist
With difficult texts:
  a. Make magnified transparencies of
     important portions;
  b. For each paragraph or section, help
     students underline ten or more words or
     concepts that are considered most impor-
     tant in understanding the text;
  c. List words on the board and together
     write a summary statement or two using as
     many of the listed words as possible; and
  d. When completed, write a summary for
     the entire text that was read.

6. Scaffolding Reading
Ask students to:
  a. Note key words in the first sentence
      of the paragraph or text;
  b. Decide which word announces the main
      idea of the paragraph or text;
  c. Note if there is a sentence that states
      the probable main idea;
  d. Note the most important words from
      the sentence that you read;
  e. Determine how the information relates
      to the information that came before it;
  f. Look for details that provide more
      specific information on the topic;
  g. Look for a sentence that concludes a
      topic;
  h. Look for words that indicate a change
      in the kind of information;
  i. Look for a sentence that provides
      information about a new aspect of the
      topic; and
  j. Look for the relationships between
     sentences in any one paragraph, such as
     transition words that change the topic.

7. Cloze Exercise I
This technique asks students to make
sense of texts through deletions:
  a. Write the title of the passage the
     students have read;
  b. Have the students guess the missing
     words in any order;
  c. Write in any words in the appropriate
     gap; and
  d. After the sentences are partially
     completed, students should be able to
     predict more of the passage.

8. Cloze Exercise II
Using a short selection from a text the
students have read:
  a. Write it on the board;
  b. Have students read it aloud together;
  c. Erase one word from anywhere in the
     text;
  d. Have the students read it again, re-
    placing the missing word;
  e. Erase another word and repeat the
     process; and
  f. Continue until all words are eliminated.

9. Scanning
Having students read with a specific
idea in mind, ask them to:
  a. Find synonyms or antonyms for words
     in a text;
  b. Make a list of grammar features in the
     text;
  c. Compare details; and
  d. List specific word sets, such as pre-
     fixes, suffixes, adjectives, topic vocabu-
     lary, etc.

10. Lengthy Text Comprehension
Determine the scope of the reading: look
at graphics and subtitles; read first and
last paragraphs; list key words or ideas
that are repeated; and look up unknown
words. Read and think about first and last
sentences; write down nouns and verbs;
then, write down some ideas. Look up only
the unknown nouns and verbs in the first
and last paragraphs and make connections
between the title and concepts in the text.