Differentiation

INNOVATIVE USE OF DICTATIONS TO ACCESS CONTENT LANGUAGE

One of the principal challenges English Language Learners (ELLs) face in comprehending content texts such as math, science and social studies is lack of familiarity with complex academic forms of language. A traditional and often neglected activity, dictation, can be used in innovative ways to help learners practice language while learning content information. This Bulletin examines six such activities.

1. WALKING DICTATION

Students work in pairs using one common blank numbered sheet "dictating" sentences from a content paragraph posted on the wall at the other end of the room. Student A begins by walking to the posted paragraph and memorizing the first sentence. Student A walks back to student B and dictates the sentence to student B, who writes it on the numbered sheet. (If student A does not remember the sentence, s/he may return to the posted text for additional help. Student B may ask student A for clarification.

After Student B has written the first sentence, s/he then walks to the posted paragraph to repeat what student A did, but with the second sentence. Students alternate with each succeeding sentence until the paragraph has been completely dictated. If used as a competition, the first pair of students to complete the dictation correctly wins.

Walking Dictation helps to promote long term memory around predictable language structures while concurrently fostering discussion and clarification of language.

2. DICTOGLOSS

This is a one sentence dictation particularly useful with long, complex sentences found in texts. The teacher dictates the sentence once only at normal conversational speed. Here is an example from physics:

The momentum of an object is constant unless an outside force acts upon it and overpowers it.
Students individually try to reconstruct the sentence; then they get together in pairs; then in groups of four. If necessary, the teacher may repeat the sentence once more.

Dictogloss forces students to listen to patterns of language so that, when discussing in groups, more accurate predicting can occur.

3. RECONSTRUCTING A PARAGRAPH
The teacher reads a selected paragraph once at normal speed without pauses. Students listen only. Then, in small groups, students write down what they remember, helping each other out. The teacher reads the paragraph again following the same procedure and with students improving on the paragraph, writing it as accurately as possible. The teacher repeats as many times as necessary until students complete the paragraph.

Reconstructing a Paragraph is an excellent activity with texts that contain transition words to help "mark" out changes in how a writer shifts the use of conceptual information.

4. CUSTOMIZING THE TEXT
From a content passage, select a dozen or so key words. Give the students the reading passage to look through. Slowly say the words you have chosen, while the students look for and underline the words in the passage. Finally, have students write the sentences from which the words were found.

Customing the Text enables students to match words they hear with their printed form and then to focus on use of these words in written context.

MIMING IT OUT
Students listen to and act out directions given by the teacher. The teacher repeats two or three times. For example, the teacher reads the following for students to mime:

"Supersize Me"
1. You’re standing in line at McDonalds. (Students mime)
2. You come to the head of the line. (Students mime, etc.)
3. You look up at and point to the list of meal choices.
4. The waiter asks for your order. You say "Number 5. For here. Supersize me."
5. Pay for your meal.
6. Take your tray of food.
7. Sit down at a booth.
8. Start eating.
9. Stuff your mouth with food.
10. Sip a coke and burp.
11. Suddenly you don’t feel well.
12. You rush to the restroom.

After performing two or three times, students, in groups, fill in a sheet of blanks based on the above.

Miming It Out adds a tactile/kinesthetic quality to students’ understanding of language use.

6. PAIRED DICTATION
This activity has students alternately dictating parts of a paragraph to each other from a partially filled text. Place students in pairs facing each other. Each has a different portion of the text to dictate, with blank spaces remaining for words to fill in by the other partner. Student A dictates the beginning of the first sentence to student B, who writes in the missing portion. Student B then dictates what s/he has for student A to fill in. Students continue back and forth, each dictating to the other until the paragraph is completed.

Example:
(Student A version) Winter is a time when

(_____ _____)______

(Student B version) _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ the sun reaches its apo-

ggee. Etc.