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D.A.R.T.S

D.A.R.T.S is an acronym that stands for Directed Activities in Reading and Thinking.(1) Originally developed by Lunzer and Gardner in 1984 and also referred to sometimes as Active Reading Strategies, these techniques aim to encourage and support learning in fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Group work and discussion play a fundamental role in these activities.

There are various ways in which D.A.R.T.S can be used to facilitate learning and help children engage with the material that we want them to understand. One procedure common to D.A.R.T.S is Classic D.A.R.T.S, or Question Framing. This involves pupils scanning a particular text and then creating questions that the text may address. The text is then reread and analysed to check if the answers are apparent within the text or whether there are deeper implications. Groups then present their findings, going over the points that have been established before rereading the text a final time to ensure nothing has been missed. This can be extremely useful when trying to ascertain the stage that different students are at, as their questions will reflect the ideas and concepts that they are unsure of.

Prediction tasks involve the pupils reading parts of a text and predicting what will happen next.

Sequencing involves the teacher splitting up a text into sections by cutting, pasting and photocopying, to ensure pupils, when it comes to putting the text in order, do not just put together a jigsaw. Sequences put together by the various groups need to be discussed and evidence needs to be provided to explain why the poem/story has been ordered in such a way.

Word deletion is another popular technique that falls into the category of D.A.R.T.S. More commonly known (whether rightly or wrongly) as Cloze Procedure, this method tends to involve the deletion of every 6th or 7th word. This isn't a rule and closer text analysis and understanding can emerge from a more strategic method of deletion, i.e. deletion of all the adjectives. Pupils predict what each word should be and insert them into the blank spaces. When read out at the end, the words previously deleted should stand out and make sense to the children.

Asking the whole class to read out the words they filled in would be time consuming so just choose a selection of groups to deliver their end results. Picking up on the diversity of answers, it is possible to show the children that within a poem/story the possibility of right words is extensive. The poem we used during the lecture, *Beside The Reservoir*, by Philip Cross, demonstrates this point perfectly and further to this, the actual words chosen by the author were often a mixture of the words our groups had decided upon, eg the line

'A surface still as _____.'

Whereas many of us had chosen 'glass', some thought the word 'stone', was more fitting. The actual word was 'marble', which is a mixture of the two.

Names of people and places should be avoided, as the possibilities are vast and will not be of

much importance to the analysis of the text. Also, guessing the exact word written by the author/poet is not a key objective. It is more important that the pupils understand the ideas that you are trying to convey.

There are various other Active Learning Strategies that are widely used, including: brainstorming, which is useful for collecting ideas; ranking, where listed ideas are ranked according to importance; force field, which involves listing pros and cons above and below a horizontal line; role-play; rewriting texts in other forms or from other viewpoints; sub-heading, and finally, witness interviews, where an expert or role-playing character is questioned by individual groups. The range of D.A.R.T.S doesn't end here but these are some of the more commonly used strategies.

The good news for English teachers wanting to incorporate more I.C.T into their lessons is that D.A.R.T.S is often closely related to I.C.T and many of the tasks can be onto PCs for the children to work through rather than being solely paper based. Bob Moy created an I.C.T specific D.A.R.T.S task known as the Developing Tray. The principles of the task are very similar to hangman and involve the pupils rebuilding the text by typing in missing letters. This may not at first appear to have much educational value but is useful in encouraging readers to engage with the text on a deeper level and is extremely supportive of students with less developed reading skills.

D.A.R.T.S is beneficial to all pupils, but in particular the close reading needed to accomplish the tasks and the group work required are extremely beneficial to bilingual students and those with special needs. It is not as easy as just simplifying the texts as there is a danger of over-simplification which would not be challenging enough for the pupils and could lead to boredom and disinterest. For these pupils D.A.R.T.S, alongside close support and encouragement from the teacher can make texts much more manageable to read. Skills such as scanning and reading for inference are also obtained through the use of these strategies and the fact that D.A.R.T.S is group work orientated allows those who are still developing their reading skills to work with stronger readers and therefore experience meaningful reading. It is also a stealthy method of getting children to reread a text as to complete the activities several readings are required.

D.A.R.T.S also allow for those children whose strengths do not lie within the realm of reading or writing, as verbal presentations are commonplace, allowing pupils to contribute their opinions and ideas. Literacy goes further than simply demanding the ability to decipher print and these strategies allow all children to be involved in a lesson.

Active Learning Strategies are not just a means to an end as they can be easily related to previous topics of work and similarly can lead into an endless possibility of future creative writing exercises.

The strategies should be used sparingly and wisely otherwise not only can they simply become time fillers but more importantly, the pupils could get used to them and they may become less effective. D.A.R.T.S is beneficial to all as a tool of encouragement and a route to deeper understanding of texts but it is important for everyone to understand that *“what the reader brings to the text is as important as what the text can offer the reader.”* (2)

- (1) Baumann,A; Bloomfield,A;Roughton,L (1997) Becoming A Secondary School Teacher pg 92. London, Hodder & Stoughton.
- (2) D.A.R.T.S online (see our web address)