

## HELPING STUDENTS INTO, THROUGH, AND BEYOND: READING STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH-AS-A-FOREIGN-LANGUAGE STUDENTS

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Reading and writing research indicates that students do both activities more successfully if the process that readers and writers engage in is consciously activated to aid in the production of products. In writing instruction, this has led to a focus on facilitating the composing process through the introduction of pre-writing, composing, revising, and editing activities. Currently the same types of strategies are available to facilitate the reading process. Many of these, developed by individual teachers or projects such as the California Literature Project, aim to help students read challenging materials in their first language. Others attempt to aid the process of analytical writing based on texts, the type of writing teachers expect university students to produce. From my own teaching and my experience working as a consultant to teachers of English as a Second Language, I have seen firsthand the ways in which these techniques also facilitate reading and writing for students studying English as a Second Language or as a Foreign Language, enabling them to read difficult materials and to respond to them in writing.

Traditionally, language texts have included readings in the target language that were limited in vocabulary and scope. Although these materials may contain appropriately comprehensible input (to use Krashen's term), they are often well below the level of intellectual sophistication found in university reading materials. As a result, writing assignments based on the readings can be unchallenging and

are often restricted to simple narratives. Intellectually unchallenging readings do little to engage student interest or to invite them to think, talk, or write in the target language, but increasing the difficulty of the texts without adequately preparing and leading students through them could leave students feeling disappointed, frustrated, and angry. What I am suggesting, instead, is that EFL and ESL teachers use materials that are typical of the type and level of difficulty of readings students will encounter in their other classes, but that these readings be made comprehensible through the use of pre-reading, reading, and post-reading strategies here labeled "Into," "Through," and "Beyond" (the terms used by the California Literature Project).

In the sections that follow, I will explain and illustrate selected strategies, collected and reconceptualized from a variety of sources (my teaching, colleagues, California Academic Partnership Program publications and the University of California, Los Angeles Center for Academic Interinstitutional Programs workshops for Teachers of English as a Second Language). As these are meant to be suggestive but not exhaustive, they can serve as a menu from which teachers can select methods to use with a particular reading and for a particular class in a particular context. The general goal is to activate what Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development, what the learner can do with some assistance and will be able to do on her own in the next stage of development. Each activity is designed to help students read actively and interact with texts in the target language.

The text I've chosen to use as an illustration of these strategies, a selection from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is in itself an argument for active involvement on the part of students in their own educations. The reading raises issues of teacher-centered versus student-centered pedagogy which is the subject of current heated debate among American educators. Freire's "banking concept" metaphor for teacher-centered education has been widely accepted by American teachers and students and is often used to criticize traditional educational forms. Freirean ideas have been instrumental in the movement toward what has come to be called "liberatory education." Whatever side of the argument students take, the topic should generate a great deal of interest and discussion. Additionally, since Freire is Brazilian, his original text may be familiar to students. This potentially could have several advantages: increasing student interest in the author and the text, allowing students to compare the original with the translation, and informing them about the worldwide influence of one of their own countrymen.

(See Appendix to this article for the Freire text.)

## “INTO”:

“Into” activities provide pre-reading strategies which engage students’ interest in the topics to be covered by the reading. They can serve a variety of purposes: some are designed to stimulate students’ imaginations about the situation they will encounter in the reading; others ask students to clarify their own attitudes toward issues that will emerge; still others activate students’ knowledge about a topic before they have to directly encounter the text. They can also be used to introduce vocabulary students will need to know before tackling the reading. Pre-reading activities give students a larger context in which to place the reading that will follow. In addition, they often work well as the basis for large or small group collaborative learning, thus providing students with opportunities to speak and listen as well as to read and write in the target language.

### *Generating Interest:*

Students may have a lot of information to contribute about Freire’s topic since it touches on their personal experiences with education. You might begin by asking students what they know about Freire and listing any information on the board. If you have clippings, articles, or film of Freire, these could be introduced to involve students with the author. If time permits, students could be instructed to research Freire in the university library.

### *Short Writing Activities:*

Another way to generate interest in a topic is to have students relate the topic to their personal lives by helping them recall personal experiences that will illuminate the themes they will soon encounter. Since the topic of this readings is education, students can be asked to think, write, and talk about their own educational experiences. Writing in class before discussion allows students to focus their thoughts, review what they know, and feel more confident when speaking.

### *Quickwrites:*

Ask students to write for ten minutes about their best or worst learning experience. Then students can each read their responses aloud, or several can volunteer to read their responses followed by a general discussion. Responses are not corrected or graded but are only used to help students engage in discussion.

*Vocabulary activities:*

Students will need help with the vocabulary in a challenging reading. However, just isolating problem words is not sufficient to ensure that they will understand and remember meanings. You must also design activities that will illuminate definitions and help students understand how words are used in context.

## a. Problem Words:

Choose a list of words that you anticipate will give students trouble. In this reading, you might choose pedagogy, oppressed, banking, deposits, communiques, ideology, disciplines, enforces, alienated, libertarian, reconciliation, critical, consciousness, paternalistic, marginal, integrated, dehumanize, prescriber. (Understanding the meaning of these words is central to understanding the ideas presented) Divide students into groups of three or four and assign two or three words to each group. Students can negotiate the definition of the words and present them to the class. Some classes may enjoy acting out the meanings and having students guess the words. Others might prefer explaining the definitions. After the presentations, the class can suggest synonyms which are recorded on the board.

## b. Clustering:

Choose a word that is a central concept in the text, such as banking, and write it on the board with a circle around it and spokes coming out of the circle. The class calls out whatever words come to mind and one person writes them on the board. Students are then supplied with other vocabulary with which to talk about this central concept.

	deposit	
withdrawal		cash
	banking	
savings		money
cost	customer	teller

## Values Clarification:

These help students understand and clarify their attitudes about a topic. Go through the text and construct a list of 6-8 statements that deal with issues that you anticipate will arise as students read. Students are asked to agree or disagree with the statements, and their responses then serve as the basis for class discussion. As an alternative, ask students to agree or disagree both before and after

reading the text to monitor any changes in their attitudes. The list below elicits student responses to key issues raised in the Freire text.

	Agree	Disagree
1. Teachers know what students need to learn.	_____	_____
2. Students should be actively involved in their own educations	_____	_____
3. The goal of an education is to memorize facts.	_____	_____
4. I learn best when I am actively involved with the subject.	_____	_____
5. School bores me.	_____	_____
6. Teachers can learn from their students.	_____	_____
7. Students should have a role in determining curriculum.	_____	_____

**Closure Activities:**

An alternative activity would ask students to complete sentences that you have constructed to reflect themes or attitudes which will emerge from the readings. Since these sentences will then reflect the students personal attitudes towards these themes, they can serve as a connection between their own beliefs and those they will encounter as they read.

1. I believe that the goal of education is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The best teachers help students to \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Active learning means that \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Students are oppressed when \_\_\_\_\_.

**“THROUGH”:**

While “Into” activities are used to generate interest in the text and to allow students to bring their personal experiences and attitudes into focus before they read, “through” activities concentrate on helping students decode the text. The purpose of this “active reading” is to promote an interactive relationship between the reader and the text. Activities are designed to help students ask their own questions about the text, predict events, or follow the development of an argument. Close reading, especially in an unfamiliar language, enables students to feel that they have mastered not only the vocabulary needed to read a text but the content and the context as well. Difficult texts may need to be worked on in sections, while more easily comprehensible texts can be dealt with as a whole.

*Partitioning the text:*

These activities involve separating the text into parts for easier comprehension. Often they are effective activities for small groups or pairs since input from several students might be needed to decode a difficult passage.

## a. Jigsaw

This activity can be organized in a variety of ways. Students can be divided into 4 or 5 person groups. Give each person in the group a section of the text to read and summarize. When students have finished reading their section, they present the summary to the rest of their group in turn. Alternatively, each group can work on one section of the reading which they could summarize for the whole class. Or groups could be recombined so that each new group contains someone who is familiar with each section of the reading. Other group activities could include identifying difficult vocabulary in a section, paraphrasing sentences or paragraphs, or dramatizing the section.

## b. Paragraphing Closing:

This activity can be used either to guide students through the text or after they have quickly read through it on their own. Students work individually or in pairs. Each individual or pair is assigned a portion of the text, for example a single paragraph or a page, which they read and summarize paragraph by paragraph with a single sentence. These sentences can then be read in order to the class, or they can be written on the board or on large sheets of papers which are displayed to serve as guides for individual reading. The sentences outline the text and can be used as a skeletal structure to be filled in with specific examples.

## c. Paraphrasing Activities:

Teachers can prepare a paraphrase of parts or all of a text and have students read the paraphrase before they read the text. Students can then compare parts of the paraphrase to the original text. One variation of this activity would ask students to look at paraphrased sentences, find the original sentence in the text, and comment on the changes. After students have worked with your paraphrases, they might write their own. Here is part of the first paragraph of the reading paraphrased into simpler language.

Education becomes a passive activity where the students get knowledge from the teacher and accept it without question. The teacher gives the students the information and they try to remember and repeat it. This is the “banking concept” of education. The teacher

acts like a person who is depositing money in the bank only she is depositing knowledge in the minds of her students. When she gives a test, she withdraws the knowledge the same way people withdraw money from a bank. In this system, students don't have the opportunity to question. They can only accept what the teacher gives them and give it back to her when she asks for it.

d. Venn Diagram:

These are especially useful in pointing up comparisons between ideas. Overlapping circles can be used to plot comparisons visually; the overlap indicates the intersection of ideas; the non-overlapping parts indicate difference. You or the students might want to make a Venn diagram that represents Freire's characterization of the roles of teachers and students. Students might want to discuss any areas where they find overlapping.

*Text Interpretation:*

The following activities help students focus on complex ideas in the text that might otherwise be ignored. Understanding these ideas as they read makes the text much more accessible.

a. T-Graph Activity:

Isolate several quotes from the text on a graph and ask students to find the quote in the text and to write their interpretation opposite the quotation. Students are thus encouraged to focus on what the author actually says and to understand it within the context of the reading.

Quotation	Interpretation
1. "The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality."	1.
2. "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students."	2.

b. Teacher- or Student-Generated Questions:

Teachers or students can bring in a list of questions that arise as they read. Organize the class into pairs, and assign each pair one question to answer. Share the answers with the class.

- (1) Is the banking method always bad?
- (2) Doesn't the teacher know more than the students?
- (3) How does Freire define an oppressive society?

c. Vocabulary

Students will need ways to build vocabulary if they are going to speak and write about the text. However, vocabulary will be more meaningful and memorable if it is related to themes within the text and grows out of students' need to talk about the text. The following activities provide ways for students to collect vocabulary around a theme or topic.

(1) Categories

You can provide general categories that relate to the text such as banking, education, teachers, students. As students read, have them collect vocabulary that fit into the general categories. These words can then be used to write about the text.

(2) Lists

Students can generate lists of words that describe various aspects of the reading. The vocabulary collected can be put on the board and used as the basis for speaking and writing.

**“BEYOND”:**

These activities ask students to generate their own texts based on the ideas they have encountered in the reading. Thus they move beyond simple understanding of the text to integration of their own thinking with the ideas they have encountered.

a. *Silent Dialogue*: This activity pairs students and asks them to conduct a ten minute dialogue based on the ideas in the reading. Begin the dialogue by writing statements that present opposing points of view on the board.

Freire says:

“The banking concept of education is ruining the ability of students to think for themselves.”

Traditional Teacher says:



"Students don't possess knowledge about subject matter. It is the teacher's duty to give the students the benefit of their expertise."

Students work in pairs, one assuming the role of Freire and one the role of the traditional teacher, and continue the dialogue in writing. The dialogues are then read aloud to the class.

b. *Reader Response*: Students write in class or at home and respond to an issue or event in the text. The response can range from a personal memory triggered by the text to a discussion of the themes that emerge. For example, students could write about their own roles in their classes or the type of class they prefer, student-centered or teacher centered. Responses can then be shared in small groups or can be shared with the class to form the basis for whole class discussion.

c. *Letters*: Letters are an especially effective writing activity for EFL or ESL students because they give the writer a real sense of audience and purpose. Students might write letters to another class summarizing the reading, motivating another student to read the text, or discussing a central issue.

d. *Role Playing*: Students have a variety of roles they can assume when talking about a text. They might pretend that they are opponents in a debate with the author and write their opening statements. This text would certainly be appropriate as the basis of a debate between Freire and a more conservative educator.

e. *Summaries*: Students can be asked to summarize Freire's argument for a variety of audiences: other students in the class; traditional educators; liberatory educators; the general public and so forth.

f. *Analytical Essay*: Topics for analytical essays may arise from teacher- or student-generated questions. You might prepare a list of questions that allow students to choose a topic that would call for analysis of ideas from the text using examples from the text, from other reading, or from personal experience.

Compare Freire's model of a teacher who uses "banking" with the teaching methods of one of your teachers. Did your teacher also use "banking?" How did that method affect your learning?

Questions can also ask students to comment on a direct quotation. Such questions force students to go back and carefully study the text:

Agree or disagree that “teachers know everything and the students know nothing.”

Additionally, themes in the reading can be related to other class assignments.

Questions don’t have to be teacher-generated. Students often are more engaged and write more effectively if they choose their own topics. Students might bring in possible essay topics which can then be put on the board and refined. They can choose their own topic from this list.

All of these strategies represent opportunities for students to work with complex texts before their skills in the target language might suggest that they would be able to handle such difficult readings. All the communicative skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—are enlisted to help students master these challenging works. As a result, teachers find that students emerge from these learning environments increasingly confident, engaged, and challenged, able to read intellectually stimulating materials in their target language and to write about them with confidence.

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## From *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED*

Paulo Freire

Education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and make deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best)

misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable, upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher.

The *raison d'être* of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

This solution is not (nor can it be) found in the banking concept. On the contrary, banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another.

Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients". They are treated as individual cases, as marginal men who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken".

The truth is, however, the oppressed are not "marginals," are not men living "outside" society. They have always been "inside"—inside the structure which made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves". Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes; hence their utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student *conscientização*.

The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality. It will deal instead with such vital questions as whether Roger gave green grass to the goat, and insist upon the importance of learning that, on

the contrary, Roger gave green grass to the rabbit. The “humanism” of the banking approach masks the effort to turn men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human.

Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a process, undergoing constant transformation. If men are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation.

But the humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, his efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His effort must be imbued with a profound trust in men and their creative power. To achieve this, he must be a partner of the students in his relations with them.

The banking concept does not admit to such partnership—and necessarily so. To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation.