

**An Overview of Directed Reading Activity (DRA)  
And Reading Comprehension**

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**Abstract**

This article describes about Directed Reading Activity (DRA) in teaching English, especially in reading comprehension. DRA is a strategy that provides students with instructional support before, during, and after reading process. Some principles of Directed Reading activity (DRA) strategy, including first, attention one of the principles of DRA that must be considered by the teacher to the learners when teaching reading in the classroom based on context to get meaning to develop skills and strategies in identifying words, sentences and paragraphs. Second, students have enough changes in reading a text deeply to identify main idea, specific/detail information, reference and also meaning in a text. Third, DRA encourages the learners to be skilled and have strategy, to explore the text aesthetically, particularly in relation to literature and to develop their conceptual prior knowledge by texts. And forth, DRA encourages the learners to self-monitoring when they are reading so that they can adjust their reading strategies as needed. It is chosen because it can create effective and creative readers who always use background knowledge to emphasize word recognition and comprehension in reading text by connecting what they are ready know and what they are reading. The learners are given chances to correct errors that occur during and after a reading process.

**Key Words:** *Directed Reading Activity, Reading Comprehension*

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## **A. Introduction**

Teaching language cannot be separated from reading activity. Reading is an integral part in daily life and also very important in academic one. The importance of good reading skill is not only perceived and prosecuted in language learning, but also in learning other subjects. Teaching reading is recognition of various written symbols, comprehension of information and ideas in reading text. According to Grellet (1996:34) teaching reading is the combination of word recognition, intellect, and emotion interrelated with prior knowledge to understand the message communicated

Reading is important to be mastered as one of the four English language skills. Reading activity that focuses on understanding context and getting new information of the text is reading comprehension. Ruddell (2005:30) asserted that reading is the act of constructing meaning while transacting with text. Reading comprehension is not just voice but also is a process to understand and construct meaning in a piece of text. Reading in a foreign or second language is much more difficult than reading in a mother tongue. It does not come naturally and needs a lot of practices. In addition, there are a number of skills and strategies which we use when reading in our first language, without being aware of them (Grabe and Fredericka, 2002:34). Reading as part of receptive skills is given the first priority in the language curriculum. Reading is important because it can help the students to gain information such as general knowledge

and subject. Through reading people can improve their own knowledge which is needed to insure the continuing personal growth and adapt to change in the world.

English reading ability becomes something crucial and indispensable for the senior high school students because the success of their learning depends on the greater part of their ability to comprehend a text. If the students' reading comprehension is poor, they will be very likely to fail in their learning or at least they will have difficulties in making progress. On the other hand, if they have good comprehension in reading, they will have a better chance to succeed in their learning.

Reading is an activity with a certain purpose as a reader's need. A student may read in order to gain the information or verify existing knowledge, or to enhance knowledge of language being read. The purpose of students' learning at school is to understand the content of short functional text in order to receive the message stated in the narrative, explanation and discussion written form and determine the appropriate approach to reading comprehension and access information in daily context (Harmer, 2002:80).

Directed Reading Activity is a strategy that provides students with instructional supports before, during, and after reading (Betts:2012). The teacher takes an active role as he or she prepares students to read the text by pre teaching important vocabulary, eliciting prior knowledge, teaching students how to use a specific reading

skill, and providing a purpose for reading. During reading, the teacher asks individual students questions about the text to monitor their comprehension. After reading, the teacher engages students in a discussion focusing on the purpose for reading, and follow-up activities that related to the content of the text and the specific skill that students learned to use.

## **B. Discussion**

### **The Nature of Directed Reading Activity (DRA)**

Directed Reading Activity (DRA) is a strategy used by the teacher to help students in reading class. Directed Reading Activity is a strategy that provides students with instructional support before, during, and after reading (Betts, 2012). The main assumption of DRA is that comprehension can be improved by developing background knowledge, specific purposes mind set to reading, discussing and comprehension development after reading (Mckenna and Robinson, 1990:46).

The teacher takes an active role as he or she prepares students to read the text by pre-teaching important vocabulary, eliciting prior knowledge, teaching students how to use a specific reading skill, and providing a purpose for reading. During reading, the teacher asks individual students questions about the text to monitor their comprehension. After reading, the teacher engages students in a discussion focusing on the purpose for reading, and follow-up activities that focus on the content of the text and the specific skill that students learned to use.

### **Purposes for Using Directed Reading Activity (DRA)**

There are some purposes for using DRA strategy in the classroom. These purposes cover eliciting students' prior knowledge of the topic of the text, setting a purpose for reading, and providing an opportunity for students to expand ideas beyond a text (Betts, 2012). Each of these steps could be explained as follows:

#### 1. Eliciting Prior Knowledge

To begin a DRA one must start by eliciting prior knowledge. Eliciting prior knowledge helps students to connect their lives, and knowledge to the central theme that the lesson is exploring. When asking students prior knowledge questions, there are different types of knowledge that we are trying to elicit, the three different types of connections teachers are trying to elicit, the connections between the text and the reader's experiences and memories.

#### 2. Setting a purpose for reading

It is important to set goals for students while reading so they know what reading strategies to use to comprehend the text. It has been proven that the purpose of reading determines the depth of a text the reader comprehends a text. When setting a purpose for reading in a DRA, it should be clear and concise focusing on the theme discussed in the graphic organizer prepared before the activity. After setting the purpose, allow students some time to reread the material. It will be easier for them to go over that material they have already read as they look for things that

specifically pertain to their purpose for reading.

3. Providing an opportunity for students to expand ideas beyond a text or discussion

The discussion portion of the activity should focus on the central theme explored in their purpose for reading. The questions should also help student to explore the concept in depth in a way that it allows them to consider different interpretations of the text. The quote that is found to be important to the central concept should not be overlooked when writing the discussion questions. The teacher should make sure to go back to the purpose for reading and also make sure that students have understood everything. These discussion questions should ask students to make explanations and support the explanations with specific examples from the text. In addition the purposes of DRA are to (1) give teachers a basic format from which to provide systematic instruction on a group basis. (2) improve students' word recognition and comprehension skills; (3) successfully guide students through a reading selection; and engage students in reading text (Tierney and Dishner, 1990:34).

The basic assumption DRA is that it is a structured strategy used by a teacher as a comprehensive way in teaching reading and it can be used as a principle for teaching guidance development. Opportunity is provided by the teacher to read text deeply in order to improve the students' word recognition. It can remove barriers to comprehension by preparing students for reading especially in emphasizing word

recognition and comprehension skill development. The teacher gives changes to the students in selecting reading material as they need and engages students in reading text in the classroom.

### **The Principles of Directed Reading Activity (DRA)**

Each teaching strategies have principles likewise Directed Reading Activity (DRA) strategy. The principles of Directed Reading activity strategy always pays attention, gives enough changes to the learners in reading deeply, encourages the learners to be skilled and have strategy and encourages the learners to self-monitoring (Hoffman and McCarthey, 2000:62-63).

Based on the statement above it can be explained that there are principles of Directed Reading activity (DRA) strategy, including first, attention is one of the principles of DRA that must be considered by the teacher to the learners when teaching reading in the classroom based on context to get meaning to develop skills and strategies in identifying words, sentences and paragraphs. Second, students have enough changes in reading a text deeply to identify main idea, specific/detail information, reference and also meaning in a text. Third, DRA encourages the learners to be skilled and have strategy, to explore the text aesthetically, particularly in relation to literature and to develop their conceptual prior knowledge by texts. And forth, DRA encourages the learners to self-monitoring when they are reading so that they can adjust their reading strategies as needed.

## **The Characteristics of Directed Reading Activity (DRA)**

To know a method and strategy in language teaching, we need some explanation of its characteristic. Related to Directed Reading activity, Ruddell (1995:434) exposed several characteristics of Directed Reading activity. Each of these characteristics could be explained as follows:

- 1) Constantly search for connection between what they know and what they encounter as new information in the text is read.
- 2) Constantly monitor the text meaning.
- 3) Take steps to repair faulty comprehension.
- 4) Learn very early to distinguish important from less important ideas in the text.
- 5) Especially, effort to synchronize the information they have read in the text and reading experience.
- 6) Make inferences during and after reading.
- 7) Sometimes consciously, almost always unconsciously, ask questions of themselves, the authors mean in the text they read.

Based on description above, DRA strategy is chosen because it can create effective and creative readers who always use background knowledge to emphasize word recognition and comprehension in reading text by connecting what they are ready know and what they are reading. The learners are given chances to correct errors that occur during and after a reading process. Also they learn as soon as possible to distinguish important or less important ideas in the text they read. DRA always provides the learners to inferences during and after reading to achieve a full, integrated understanding of what they found in the reading text. It is not only students who work individually but also collectively, for example, they consciously or unconsciously

ask questions among their peers what the authors mean in the text.

## **The Steps of DRA in Teaching Reading Comprehension**

Basically, Directed reading activity comes from basal reader approach which emphasis on teaching reading according to teaching steps that has been set.

The steps of DRA namely: 1) Choose a text. 2) Select vocabulary. 3) Elicit prior knowledge. 4) Teach students specific skill. 5) Give students a concrete purpose for reading. 6) Have students read silently. 7) Set the purpose statement as a question. 8) Engage students in follow-up activities (Betts, 2012)

From the steps above, it can be concluded that choosing a text is used because this strategy is intended to be used with report or descriptive text. In selecting vocabulary from the text to be pre taught, the words chosen must be critical to comprehension of the passage and vocabulary should be taught in context. Then teacher writes the words on the board in sentences taken directly from the text. The teacher discusses what the words might mean based on the context, sound, and structure.

Eliciting prior knowledge means the teacher have to ask the students what they already know about the term of reading. Meanwhile in teaching students a skill to help them comprehend the text, the teacher can choose an appropriate skill in accordance with on the text. For example, if the text is a report text, teacher might talk about how to identify fact from the author. In addition if the text is a descriptive text might teach about how to find main topic or main idea.

Giving students a concrete purpose for reading strategy is intended for making them focused on the reading. For example, "Read paragraph 1-5 to find out what is the main idea". The teacher asks students to read silently then they must ready for questions. The teacher walks around the room asking individual students comprehension questions. To set the purpose statement as a question is used after students have finished reading, for example, "What is the main idea of this paragraph?". The teacher must encourage the students to have a discussion that grows from students' comments and questions.

In engaging students in follow-up activities the teacher should design activities that reinforce both the content of the text and the skill that students learned. Activities might include writing activities, further reading, art projects, group mapping activities, etc.

Meanwhile Herber (1978 taken from Ruddell 2005:120) asserted the five steps of the DRA including: 1) preparation for reading, 2) guided silent reading, 3) comprehension development, 4) skill development and application, and 5) extension and follow up activities.

The preparation for Reading of DRA, step 1 includes two types. First, vocabulary presentation, in presenting vocabulary words from the paragraph is pre-taught for the purpose of reducing or removing barriers to comprehension. The second part of preparation for reading focuses student attention on the subject matter of the text and engages student interest and perception. It begins with the teacher's focusing statements

and questions, for example, "Today we are going to begin our subject on "Forests". What do you already know about forest? or How many types of forests do you know? What are the advantages of forest?".

Guided silent reading, steps 2, involves an entire paragraph, chapter, article, essay, or short story that is too lengthy to finish in one class period. Teacher can handle this by initiating silent reading in class, so that he/she has time to observe students as they read and gives assistance to those who need it, and then assign unfinished reading to be completed as homework.

Discussion of the reading occurs on the next day of class after a short (3- to 5 minute) review period. When the text is particularly long or difficult, however, the teacher may need to provide more guidance by dividing the reading into sections, stopping at the end of each section for discussion and then suggesting another purpose for continued reading.

Comprehension development, steps 3, begins the moment the DRA lesson: in discussion of the language of text (vocabulary presentation), schema activation and sharing or prior knowledge (focusing question), and statement of purpose for reading (guiding silent reading). Immediately following the reading (or at the beginning of the next class), the purpose-setting statement is asked as a question to initiate discussion; for example, what are some of the effects of wind on weather? or How do people's environment and culture influence their wants and needs?.

Skill development and application, steps 5, should follow logically and reasonably from discussion that has taken place and from the lesson objectives. It may, in fact, occur as part of the discussion during and immediately following reading. This part of the DRA is intended to give students the opportunity to practice doing what they have just learned to do, whether it is observing and recording weather conditions, interpreting text, or understanding the historical forces about the Vietnam War.

Extension and follow-up activities, steps 5, are sometimes difficult to design. One that for all subject areas is the three minute write as a quick write activity, students will explore further for example, in paragraph 3. Very simply, three-minutes Write is 3 minutes of time, at the end of a lesson or class, in which students are asked to write about what they learned, what they did not learn, what they understood, what they did not understand, what they want more, and what bothered them-in short, to write about their immediate analysis of their learning and of the class period.

In addition Eanes (1997:112) stated Directed Reading Activity is a strategy that consists of three phases: 1) preparation, 2) directed silent reading, and 3) follow up. Referring to phases above, Preparation phase is begun by activating the learners' schemata, introducing new word, and setting the reading purposes. In directed silent reading phase, the learners read the text silently and they answer reading purpose that has been set on the last step of preparation phase. In the follow-up

phase the learners ensure: 1) the purposes set can be achieved, and directing the learners to review and evaluate their comprehension by themselves. 2) directing the learners to analyze or review and reflect contents and motivate the learners to discuss contents. 3) providing enrichment.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Directed Reading Activity (DRA)**

The teachers need to know advantages and disadvantages as consideration in choosing a strategy or a method in teaching language. It also applies to the teaching of reading skill in choosing DRA as teaching strategy. DRA also has some advantages and disadvantages like the other strategies. Hoffman and McCarthey (2000:48) exposed some advantages of DRA as follows:

- 1) DRA is a motivating teaching strategy. Students enjoy making predictions and then finding out whether or not their predictions are correct. Their predictions by connecting their prior knowledge when they are reading text.
- 2) DRA is also a very flexible strategy in that it can be used individually, with a small group, or with an entire class.
- 3) It can also be used in any subject and can meet the needs of any leveled reader.

DRA is chosen as strategy in teaching reading comprehension because the students always use prior knowledge to guess the meaning when they face difficulties in comprehending the text. They always search connection between what they know and what they encounter as new information in the text is read. DRA can be applied individually discussion when there are only one student is

guided by the teacher. It can also be applied in the small group or whole students in the class (without group). This strategy is not only used in teaching English but also it can be used for variety of subjects that related to comprehending a text based on context and it can meet the needs of reader or student levels.

Besides the advantages, DRA also has disadvantages as Hoffman and McCarthy (2000:49) stated DRA may be time consuming, depending on the length of the text. This is because students need linking their prior knowledge in discussion and if the text is too long so teaching and learning process must be continued in the next meeting.

#### **D. Conclusion**

DRA is a reading comprehension teaching strategy to improve student reading

comprehension by developing background knowledge, specific purposes mind set to reading, discussing and comprehension development after reading. The basic assumption DRA is that it is a structured strategy used by a teacher as a comprehensive way in teaching reading and it can be used as a principle for teaching guidance development. Opportunity is provided by the teacher to read text deeply in order to improve the students' word recognition. It can remove barriers to comprehension by preparing students for reading especially in emphasizing word recognition and comprehension skill development. The teacher gives changes to the students in selecting reading material as they need and engages students in reading text in the classroom.

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