SESSION 3: ASSESSING AND BUILDING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

Overview
In Session 2, you explored the connection between book genres and students' comprehension. You learned about different genres of children's books, focused on the importance of using expository text with young students, and had the opportunity to survey your own or another teacher's classroom to evaluate the variety of books available to students. In this session, you will explore the ways in which students' prior knowledge affects their comprehension of text. You will learn techniques for assessing and building students' prior knowledge before reading.

Objectives
By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Explain the role of prior knowledge in comprehension through online discussion.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of a video depicting a brainstorming approach to assessing prior knowledge through your online journal.
- Design, implement, and analyze an assessment of students' prior knowledge.

If you haven't done so already, download and print the Assignment Checklist to keep track of your assignments for this course.
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Assessing Prior Knowledge

Research indicates that teachers are able to provide more carefully targeted instruction if they first assess students’ prior knowledge. In this section, you will learn techniques for doing so.

K-W-Ls to Assess Prior Knowledge

Read "Fostering Reading Comprehension" to learn about a variety of strategies for fostering comprehension in emergent readers. One of the specific strategies outlined in the book excerpt, K-W-L, is an effective method of assessing students’ prior knowledge about a topic before reading. As you read, take notes on how to use the K-W-L procedure in the non-assessed section of your online journal.

Variations in Prior Knowledge

Research shows that students come to PreK with tremendous variations in the experiences they have had and therefore the amount of prior knowledge about a wide range of topics. Engage in an online discussion about this issue by responding to the following question:

How does the variation in students' prior knowledge affect their comprehension? Think of specific students with whom you have worked, if applicable, and provide concrete examples of how variations in prior knowledge affect their comprehension.

Justify your statements by referring to the readings as well as examples from your professional practice.

As you complete the rest of the readings and assignments for this session, you should go to the discussion forum at least two or three times to continue the discussion. Refer to the discussion rubric to review some expectations for participating in online discussions in this course.

Brainstorming to Assess Prior Knowledge

View the "Assessing Prior Knowledge" video. In the video, a kindergarten teacher is preparing to read aloud an informational book to her class. Before she reads, she uses a brainstorming technique to find out what students already know about the topic. As you watch this video, note what the teacher does to elicit students’ prior knowledge and what prior knowledge students have about the topic.

In Session 4, you will see a video of the same teacher reading a book aloud to the class and will be asked to analyze the ways in which the teacher uses her assessment of students' prior knowledge to form her instruction.

After watching the "Assessing Prior Knowledge" video, respond to the following questions in your online journal:
Did every student have the same kind and depth of prior knowledge?
What misconceptions did students have?
Was this activity successful in eliciting students’ prior knowledge? Why or why not?
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Building Prior Knowledge

Assessing students' prior knowledge often leads teachers to discover deficits in students' prior knowledge that are likely to affect their comprehension. In this section, you will consider ways to build students' prior knowledge.

Building Prior Knowledge before Reading Assignment

Read the chapter "Prior Knowledge." This chapter addresses the issue of how to build students' knowledge about a given topic prior to reading. It offers a varied menu of practical strategies. As you read, you may wish to take notes in your online journal about the various techniques described in the readings. Following the reading, you will be asked to complete an assessment of students' prior knowledge and design a corresponding plan for building their prior knowledge. The notes you take in your online journal may come in handy for this assignment.

Identifying the different learning styles and needs of your students in order to inform your instruction is critical. Consider the following when planning for instruction in your classroom.

**Differentiated Instruction**

Research shows that students from low-income homes enter school with prior knowledge that differs from that of their more affluent peers. Read "Developing Disadvantaged Children's Background Knowledge Interactively" to better understand the unique needs of low-income children and gain effective strategies for building their prior knowledge.

Assessing and Building Prior Knowledge

1. Using what you learned in Session 2 about selecting engaging and appropriate books for students, select a book that you plan to read aloud to either PreK or kindergarten students. Make sure that the book is challenging and contains topics, concepts, and vocabulary you would not expect all students this age to know. You may select a book from our sample book list or choose your own.
2. Now select one technique from the readings or video (e.g., brainstorming, KWL, etc.) to elicit students' background information.
3. With a group of PreK or kindergarten students, use your chosen technique for assessing prior knowledge. If you are unable to find a group of students, you may complete this activity with a single PreK or kindergarten student. Make sure you gain parental permission when doing so.
4. Write a 1-2 page analysis of this activity, using the following questions to guide you:
   - What book and central concepts did you select?
   - What did students know about the topics or central concepts you assessed?
   - What misconceptions did students have?
   - How do you predict students' prior knowledge will affect their
Based on your assessment of students' prior knowledge, what would you do to build their knowledge base related to the book? Be specific in your plans.

5. Don’t forget to refer to the assessment rubric for this assignment.

6. Submit your written work to your facilitator in a word processing document.

References


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Look Ahead

Remember, you will need to complete a final project in Session 6. At this time you may want to consider which concepts from this session you would like to incorporate into your professional development seminar. If you have questions or would like some advice, this is a good time to ask your facilitator. You should also look at the final project rubric for this assignment now.

In Session 4, you will learn about the interactive read-aloud, a technique for reading aloud to students systematically to build comprehension. You will need to work with a student or a group of students for the assignment in this session. If you are not currently teaching, arrange to meet with one or more appropriately aged students.

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