

3.2 Active Learning

Teachers know that students learn best when they are interested, involved and appropriately challenged by their work. Research confirms that when actively engaged, learners will have a longer concentration span, complete work on time, stay on task, demonstrate fewer behavioural problems, be more confident and generally make faster progress. Active learner techniques should be used at various points in the lesson so that learners can be fully engaged in the process of learning.

Active learning ensures that learning is 'deep', that is to say it is associative, contextualised and interactive. When learners are merely reproducing or memorising given facts, accepting ideas and information passively, they are only engaged in so-called 'surface' learning. They are not being asked to look for principles or patterns or to reflect on thinking. Learners are engaged in deep learning when they try to make sense of the material and relate ideas and information to previous knowledge and experience. Deep learning prepares learners for higher level skills such as the critical evaluation of received information or having the internal organisational framework to sort and integrate concepts and ideas.

In English, DARTS activities (**D**irected **A**ctivities **R**elated to **T**exts) can be used with reading. These include:

- Text completion, such as completing gaps with deleted words (cloze exercises), sentences, phrases, or selecting the right synonym from a cluster
- Diagrams constructed from a written text, e.g. flow diagrams, concept-maps, illustrations, storyboards
- information sorted and categorised into a table or grid
- Text segmented into sections and headings/labels added
- Text underlined for specific target words or phrases, e.g. words that support a particular view
- Text predicted from a title or initial paragraph etc.
- Text that learners have to re-order from a jumbled state.

To be active learners, students need to be explicitly involved in and aware of the processes of their own thoughts. They need to be asked to think and talk about not just what they are working on but **how** they are thinking and learning. Learners need to be given the opportunity to outline their thinking on work they have been doing, and should be asked routinely to articulate any difficulties so that misconceptions are flagged up. The ability to step back from a difficult task, consider how it should be done, monitor progress, reflect on successes and weaknesses are all part of becoming a successful learner.