Connecting cut-out sentences to form a coherent passage

The sentences in a text are cut out and scrambled. Then, the groups read the sentences and help each other in forming a coherent passage. The first time this exercise is given, the passages selected have some connectives as guides then on the succeeding exercises, they are given passages without any connectives.

Comprehending sentences

Students are given sentences that are about people and situations. Then, they are asked to match these sentences with the questions given. For example: *Question:* who will most probably refuse to contribute to charity? *Answer:* Mrs. Jones believes that helping the poor is the government's responsibility.

Tell me the news

Each group is given a daily English newspaper and assigned a news item to read. Then one of the members of the group discusses what the news item was about. If other groups have any questions, then any one of the members may answer them.

Select a holiday

Each group is given a brochure about some holiday packages. They are informed of how much money they can bring and the number of days they can stay. Based on this information, they select the holiday package that is most suitable for their group.

The students may also be asked to search a good place for a holiday from the internet. Then armed with the information they have gathered about hotel rates, the places to see, ways of transport, shopping areas, and an approximate amount of daily expenses, they can discuss and suggest a place to the other groups.

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> **The teacher's concern is not only the classroom activities but also how the students react to those activities. Students who have the ability to learn may not be able to maximize this ability if they have negative feelings toward the teacher, the subject they are studying, the course of study, or other students in class**

but, whether the game to be done is competitive or not depends on who the students are and what kind of relationship they have with each other.

The following are the different classroom activities and games that I use in my reading classes, and I find them effective in gaining the students' interest in the subject and in improving their learning.

Spelling

Words that have been learned in class with difficult or confusing spellings are dictated to the students and each group discusses the spelling and writes them on a piece of paper, together with their meanings. In order to break any possible ties, a few words which have not been taught in class, but familiar to them are also included.

Vocabulary

1. Providing meanings of words: words are given and the group writes the meanings; or the meanings of the words are given and the group guess which words they refer to.

2. Squabble or forming words from cut-out letters: cut- out letters are given to each group to form several words, then they write the words on a piece of paper together with their meanings. The group that finishes sooner is the winner.

3. Writing meaningful sentences from words learned in class: students are given some words and asked to form sentences. The sentences should be meaningful and grammatically correct. Since the correction of this activity is subjective, the teacher should decide on some specific criteria especially with reference to the meaningfulness of the sentence.

4. students guess the meanings of words by using their knowledge of the meanings of stems, prefixes, and suffixes.

Connectives

In this exercise, the students are given a reading passage where the connectives have been omitted. They should fill-in the blanks with the connectives they think are most suitable.

Guessing meanings of words from context

Students are given some unfamiliar words, used in sentences, and they are asked to guess their meanings from context. Another way is to give them humorous stories and ask them to pick up some of the unfamiliar words and guess their meaning from the context in which they have been used.
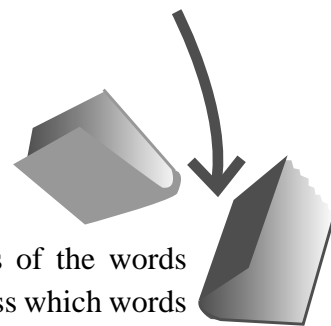
all must contribute productively to the ongoing activity. Whenever assistance is needed, the teacher should be there to help. After the time given to do the activity is over, the teacher should check the results of the activity. He should collect the written work, have the students read their papers aloud, or ask other students to read their papers, etc., depending on the outcomes of the activity.

The teacher's concern is not only the classroom activities but also how the students react to those activities. Students who have the ability to learn may not be able to maximize this ability if they have negative feelings toward the teacher, the subject they are studying, the course of study, or other students in class. On the other hand, students with low aptitude may become successful in class if they are attentive, diligent, willing to participate, and try hard. Thus, it is very important to promote positive attitude among the students. Teachers should keep in mind that students would like to repeat those activities that satisfy them and try to avoid those that make them feel bad. This is because they want to be successful. They learn more when they are satisfied with themselves. This is because nobody wants to feel that he is a loser.

Just like class activities, games are more often used in language classes to motivate students to learn. Games are fun for children, adolescents, and even adults, and almost everyone would agree that if learning is enjoyable, students will learn more. As Johnson (1973) has mentioned, the

In teaching reading, it will be useful if they are taught first some reading strategies and other important points which are necessary for understanding a text

use of language in games is task- oriented… which means the purpose of which is not, in the end, the correct or appropriate use of language itself. Gasser and Waldman (1978) adds that language use takes priority over language practice, therefore, games help bring the class to the real world.

This does not mean that language is not practiced in ESL games. In fact, each game, by nature, focuses on one or more aspects of language. The teachers must pay attention to the fact that not only the objective of the game must be correct but also their language. Thus, games can make the students learn and it will be a good idea to include them in the class program. The type of games and the procedure to be followed depends on the teacher's purpose in using them, and the level of the class. Gasser and Waldman (1978) suggest that interruptions should be as infrequent as possible in order not to detract the students' interest. Hence, the teacher has the option to correct or not to correct the students' language errors during the game. Most games contain an element of competition;

following directions, improving reading speed, timed word selection, timed reading and vocabulary recall. Each activity should start by the teacher explaining the purpose to the students.

Suggestions for a more interactive class

As a teacher of reading, what I have experienced in my classes is that using group activities and games are good ways to make the students really interested and willing to participate actively in class. They like competition, and they will do things the teachers never expected.
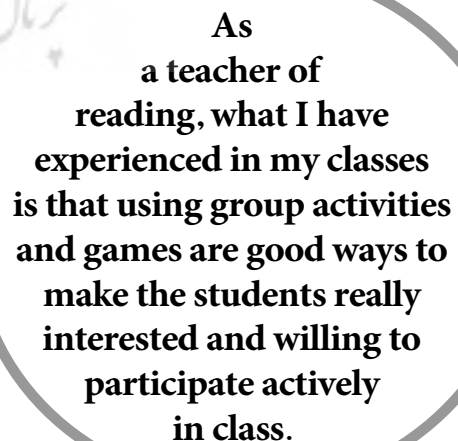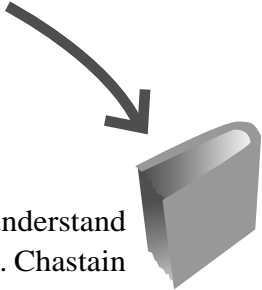
Group activities and games

When devising classroom activities, teachers may arrange the students into some specific grouping patterns: whole class, small group, and individual activities. In these arrangements, one is not better than the other. What is important is the suitability for the teacher, the type of students, and the kind of activities to be done. In my class, small group is preferable because they can do their works in a more cooperative way. More interaction is generated because there are only five students in each group and for all types of activity or game they had, discussion was necessary.

Preparing students to work in groups entails time and it is necessary that the teacher familiarize the students with what to do during the activity. Students cannot guess what is in the teacher's mind so it is

his responsibility to make them understand what it is they are supposed to do. Chastain (1988) suggests that the teacher should lead the students through the topic to activate their schemata. Then, he should encourage the students to produce as many ideas about the topic as possible, which would also allow them to review related vocabulary. Finally, he should inform them of what to do during the activity and explains specific organizations he has in mind, or what he expects them to fulfill.

The sequence of activities and the pace are important parts of teaching and learning. Negative affective reactions and negative cognitive results may occur if the materials and activities introduced are not arranged from easy to difficult or if the materials/ activities given are beyond the students' abilities.

During the activity the teacher must make his students aware of his presence. He should actively go around the class and make everyone realize that he expects all students to pay attention to what they are doing, that all must participate, and

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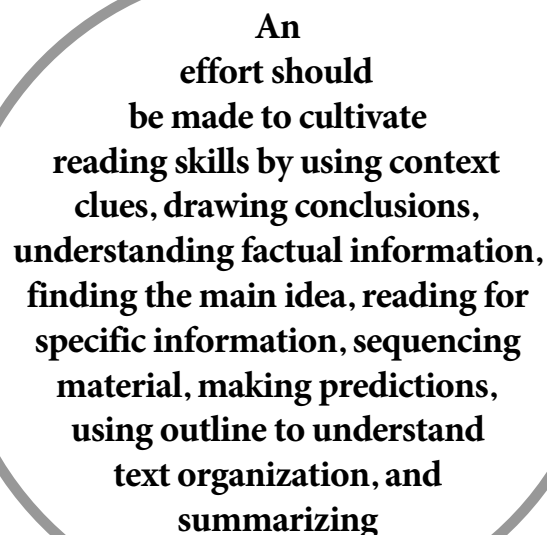
them to learn by making the class more interesting and the students more willing to participate? It seems that the importance of the students as learners has been forgotten and the focus is only plased on reading the text and answering questions.

Nevertheless, when a class does not succeed, we cannot always put the blame on the students' lack of interest and motivation. Instead, we should try to find out the causes of the problems. In as much as the students play an important role in the classroom, it cannot be denied that the teachers are equally important. The teachers must be competent enough to teach and speak the language they want to teach; otherwise, the students will lose their trust in them that may eventually lead to lack of interest and motivation. Their teaching should be organized in such a way that it will arouse the students' interest. They need to be creative so that the students can actively participate and be interested in the subject. It's about time that teachers would think twice about the usual "read the passage then answers the questions after them".

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the following recommendations are put forward:

In teaching reading, it will be useful if they are taught first some reading strategies and other important points which are necessary for understanding a text. They should be prepared to understand the

> An effort should be made to cultivate reading skills by using context clues, drawing conclusions, understanding factual information, finding the main idea, reading for specific information, sequencing material, making predictions, using outline to understand text organization, and summarizing

material they are going to read and to be able to appreciate it. Keep in mind that reading is purposeful and most motivating when the students enjoy the material they read. In addition, flexibility is also needed when designing and accomplishing instruction and the lessons should fit the teading. Give the students the opportunity to express their ideas about the topic of the passage. The teacher should not say anything if there are some students who can say it for him. Strategy instruction should be emphasized and activities for strategy use should be provided.

An effort should be made to cultivate reading skills by using context clues, drawing conclusions, understanding factual information, finding the main idea, reading for specific information, sequencing material, making predictions, using outline to understand text organization, and summarizing. Therefore, exercises have to be provided that would include context clues, language focus, sentence study, finding the main idea, scanning, sequencing/predicting,
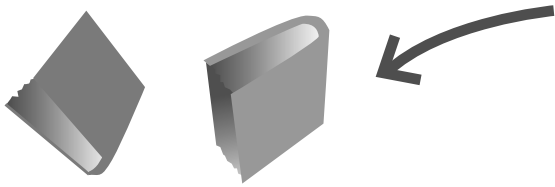
order to attain this end, observation of thirty- one (31) English classes in Rasht was carried out. The study covered 12 males and 19 female teachers whose degree was in TEFL. Since it is not possible to mention the results of all the observations done, this article focuses only on the reading class as a whole and how reading comprehension was taught in the classes observed.

It was readily obvious that students in almost all the classes observed were not interested and had very low motivation to learn. Most of them did not listen to their teachers. As a result, the teachers were forced to stop once in a while to ask the students to pay attention. It was also observed that most of the students had the answer key books open from where they read their answers. Unfortunately, the teachers did not care about their students' using them. Using answer keys was an indication that the students had not understood the passage they read or had not bothered to read it before going to class. The essence of reading is comprehension and when the readers do not comprehend, they are not reading.

Ninety- seven percent (97%) of the teachers observed read the passages aloud and 64% of them read the passage once. None of them attempted to activate the students' previous knowledge of the topic before beginning to read. Chastain (1988) believes that the reader should center his/her attention on the text and incorporate previously acquired knowledge and skills to understand what the writer has written. It was also noticed that 64% translated the text sentence by sentence. Some teachers, 55% corrected the students' mistakes promptly and 52% assigned the comprehension questions as homework. About 19% asked the students to read their answers to the comprehension questions orally while 32% required them to write their answer on the board–a time- consuming task. Others, 12% in each of the subsequent cases (a) read the passage slowly; (b) asked questions about the passage in English; and, (c) read and translate the comprehension questions.

The teachers required the following from the students: in 19% of the cases, the answers to comprehension questions were translated; in 26% of the cases, the students wrote the translation of the passage in their notebooks; in 19% of the cases, the students read the passage after the teacher; in 16% of the cases, they translated the passage; 6% read the paragraphs for other students to translate; 6% gave the translation of sentences given by the teacher; and 6% wrote the answers to comprehension questions in class–another time- consuming activity.

Apparently, there was a great utilization of L1 in the classes observed. When the teachers were asked why they conducted their classes the way they did, they replied that the students were weak and were not willing to use English in class. It could be guessed that the same thing exists in other places as reported by our students coming from different cities. As a result, the students seem not to be active participants, the reason perhaps is that they get bored and lose their interest. But, can we not encourage
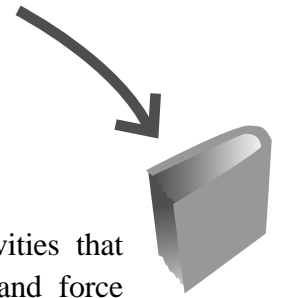
the classroom. Our students should know that reading is the process of interaction between the reader's prior background knowledge and the text itself. Carrell (1984) also states that schema theory predicts that as readers read a certain text, they go further than the word and sentence level to the whole organization and discourse level of the reading. This is because their background knowledge or schemata allow them to anticipate and to guess the way in which the writer has arranged the material. In other words, the learners' knowledge of story schemata, or the pattern of writing, enables them to use the conventions of their language to understand the text.

Cultural differences can be a big hindrance to comprehension because these differences prevent the learners from precisely guessing what is to come and this different approach can lead to failure in comprehension (Adams, 1983; Reynolds, 1982). As reading teachers, therefore, we should try our best to minimize reading difficulties and to maximize comprehension. One way of doing this is by providing culturally relevant information. Goodman (1979) places this issue into focus when he states that:

> …even highly effective readers are severely limited in comprehension of text by what they already know before they read. The author may influence the comprehensibility of a text particularly for specific targeted audiences. But no author can completely compensate in writing for the range of differences among all potential reading of a given text. (p.660)

Long and Richards (1987) believe that

there should be classroom activities that minimize teacher intervention, and force students to use and develop their new language skills. Hence, a classroom teacher is seen as having three basic roles, namely: as teacher, as participant, and as facilitator. The teacher as teacher is essential only when the class is attempting to resolve a language problem. In this case, he is presumed to be more knowledgeable than the learners. If the task is realistic and students have adjusted their reading strategies according to the task, teacher intervention is hardly needed. The teacher is a participant in activities where the knowledge and opinions of everyone in class are of equal importance. These activities include discussions which arise from reading activities, forming judgments related to ideas encountered in readings, and activities stressing learning about a subject by way of the target language. Finally, the teacher acts as a facilitator when creating an environment where learning can take place, where linguistic expertise is needed only in case of communication breakdown. Assignments can be discussed and corrected wighout teacher participation. Individualized assignments or small group sessions do not necessitate direct teacher intervention.

Reading comprehension class: an observation

The following discussion based on a study that aimed at finding out how high school teachers in Rasht teach the skills covered in the high school textbooks. In

Abstract

Reading has been wrongly referred to as a passive skill because unlike speaking or writing it does not produce messages. Nonetheless, it needs mental processing for communication to occur. Hence, to consider reading as a passive skill can lead to a misconception that can delude students and impair their opinion about their role in the reading process (Chastain 1988). This paper is based on observations conducted in high schools in Rasht. Observations revealed that in most cases, the students were not actively involved due to the methods the teachers used, and this might be the reason why the students observed seemed disinterested in their English classes. Based on the observation and the experience of the present researcher, some class activities that proved useful in actively involving the students in the lessons laught are put forward.

Key Words: interactive reading, reading strategies, method, technique, schemata.

Introduction

Several authorities in ESL/EFL outline a number of techniques in teaching Reading. Chastain (1988) points out the importance of considering reading as a communicative rather than a language learning process. Loew's (in Chastain, 1988: 224) advice follows: Encourage students to guess, to tolerate ambiguity, to link ideas, to paraphrase, and to summarize. Help them by discussing the title, theme, and cultural background before reading. Grellet (1981) suggests inferring meaning through word formation and context. Krashen and Terrell (1983) offer the following strategies: Read for meaning; don't look up every word; predict meaning; and, use context. These have been tried out in several language classes, but the outcome has not been uniformly satisfactory. This may be because one of the most important factors in ESL/EFL classes, the students,have never had the opportunity to play active roles in a reading classes. A class, no matter how well programmed it is, and no matter how much the teacher is prepared, will not be successful if the learners are not motivated and therefore not involved in the learning process.

The fundamental goal in teaching reading comprehension is to help students become independent readers outside the EFL/ESL classroom. Ideally, we would expect learners who would read in English to learn from the text they read. But, as Anderson (1977) puts it, "without some schema into which it can be assimilated, an experience is incomprehensible, and therefore, little can be learned from it" (p.420). Thus, classroom activities and techniques will be valid provided that they are applicable to the real world beyond the reading classroom. Those culture-specific interferences, problems that are dealt with in the classroom offer an opportunity to build a new culture-specific schema that will be available to the learners outside

Why not a more interactive reading class?

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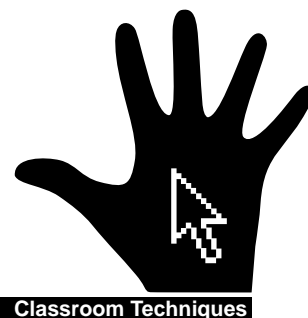
Classroom Techniques

چکیده

مهارت خواندن به اشتباه به‌عنوان یک مهارت انفعالی در نظر گرفته می‌شود، زیرا برخلاف مهارت گفتار یا نوشتار، بازخوردی تولید نمی‌کند. با وجود این، خواندن فرایند ذهنی ارتباطی خاصی را می‌طلبد. بنابراین، تلقی خواندن به‌عنوان یک مهارت انفعالی ممکن است به یک تصور اشتباه بینجامد که خود می‌تواند دانش‌آموزان را به اشتباه اندازد و نظر آنها را نسبت به نقش فعالشان در فرایند خواندن مخدوش کند(چستین، ۱۹۸۸).

مقالۀ حاضر براساس مشاهدات مؤلف از تعدادی از کلاس‌های درس زبان انگلیسی چند دبیرستان در رشت تنظیم شده است. مشاهدات نشان می‌دهند که در اکثر موارد، به دلیل نوع فعالیت‌های به‌کار گرفته شده، دانش‌آموزان در فرایند خواندن درگیر نمی‌شوند و این امر به بی‌علاقگی آنها به درس زبان منجر می‌شود. در پایان تعدادی از فعالیت‌هایی که براساس تجربیات مؤلف می‌توانند در درگیر کردن دانش‌آموزان در امر خواندن مؤثر باشند، معرفی شده‌اند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: خواندن تعاملی، مهارت‌های خواندن، روش تدریس، تکنیک، طرح واره