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**TEACHING SKILLS: TEACHING READING**

**Course Outline**

* Reasons for reading
* Different kinds of reading
* Reading levels
* Reading principles
* Reading suggestions
* Encouraging students to read extensively

1.Reasons for reading

There are many reasons why getting students to read English texts is an important part of the teacher’s job. In the first place, many students want to be able to read texts in English either for their careers, for study purposes or simply for pleasure. Anything we can do to make it easier for them to do these things must be a good idea.

Reading is useful for *language acquisition*. Provided that students more or less understand what they read, the more they read, the better they get at it. Reading also has a positive effect on students’ vocabulary knowledge, on their spelling and on their writing.

Reading texts also provide good models for *English writing*. At different times we can encourage students to focus on vocabulary, grammar or punctuation. We can also use reading material to demonstrate the way we construct sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. Students then have good models for their own writing

Lastly, good reading texts can introduce interesting *topics,* stimulate discussion, excite imaginative responses and provide the springboard for well-rounded, fascinating lessons

**2.**Different kinds of reading

We need to make a distinction between extensive and intensive reading. The term extensivereading refers to reading which students do often (but not exclusively) away from the classroom. They may read novels, web pages, newspapers, magazines or any other reference material. Where possible, extensive reading should involve *reading for pleasure* – what Richard Day calls joyful reading. This is enhanced if students have a chance to choose what they want to read, if they are encouraged to read by the teacher, and if some opportunity is given for them to share their reading experiences. Although not all students are equally keen on this kind of reading, we can say that the ones who read most progress faster.

The term intensive reading, on the other hand, refers to the detailed focus on the construction of reading texts which takes place usually (but not always) in classrooms Teachers may ask students to look at extracts from magazines, poems, Internet websites, novels, newspapers, plays and a wide range of other text **genres** .The exact choice of genres and topics may be determined by the specific purposes that students are studying for (such as business, science or nursing). In such cases, we may well want to concentrate on texts within their specialities. But if, as is often the case, they are a mixed group with differing interests and careers, a more varied diet is appropriate, as the reading sequences in this chapter will demonstrate.  
 *Intensive reading* is usually accompanied by study activities. We may ask students to work out what kind of text they are reading, tease out details of meaning, look at particular uses of grammar and vocabulary, and then use the information in the text to move on to other learning activities. We will also encourage them to reflect on different reading skills

3.Reading levels

When we ask students to read, the success of the activity will often depend on the level of the text we are asking them to work with.

Ideally, we would like students to read *authentic* texts - in other words, texts which are not written especially for language learners, but which are intended for any competent user of the language. However, at lower levels this can often present insuperable problems since the amount of difficult and unknown language may make the texts impenetrable for the students. A balance has to be struck between real English on the one hand and the students’ capabilities and interests on the other. There is some authentic written material which beginner students can understand to some degree: menus, timetables, signs and basic instructions, for example, and, where appropriate, we can use these. But for longer prose, we may want to offer our students texts which are written or adapted especially for their level. The important thing, however, is that such texts are as much like real English as possible.

How well the students are able to deal with reading material will depend on whether the texts are designed for intensive or extensive reading. Where students read with the support of a teacher and other students, they are usually able to deal with higher-level material than if they are reading on their own. If we want them to read for pleasure, therefore, we will try to ensure that they do not attempt material that is just too difficult for them - as a result of which they may be put off reading. This is why lower-level students are encouraged to use *simplified* or *graded readers* for extensive reading. The readers are graded so that at different levels they use language appropriate for that level - very much like the *comprehensible input*. As a result, the students can take  
pleasure in reading the books even when there is no teacher there to help them.

**4. Reading skills**

Students, like the rest of us, need to be able to do a number of things with a reading text. They need to be able to *scan*the text for particular bits of information they are searching for (as, for example, when we look for a telephone number, what’s on television at a certain time or search quickly through an article looking for a name or other detail). This skill means that they do not have to read every word and line; on the contrary, such an approach would stop them scanning successfully.  
  
 Students also need to be able to *skim* a text - as if they were casting their eyes over its surface - to get a general idea of what it is about (as, for example, when we run our eyes over a film review to see what the film is about and what the reviewer thought about it, or when we look quickly at a report to get a feel for the topic and what its conclusions are). Just as with scanning, if students try to gather all the details at this stage, they will get bogged down and may not be able to identify the general idea because they are concentrating too hard on specifics.

Whether readers scan or skim depends on what kind of text they are reading and what they want or need to get out of it. They may scan a computer ‘Help’ window to find the one piece of information they need to get them out of a difficulty, and they may skim a newspaper article to pick up a general idea of what’s been happening in the world.

*Reading for detailed comprehension***,** whether this entails looking for detailed information or picking out particular examples of language use, should be seen by students as something very different from the skills mentioned above.

Many students are perfectly capable of doing all these things in other languages, of course, though some may not read much at all in their daily lives. For both types of student, we should do our best to offer a mixture of materials and activities so that they can practice using these various skills with English text.

**5.Reading principles**

* ***Principle 1: Encourage students to read as often and as much as possible.***

The more students read, the better. Everything we do should encourage them to read extensively as well as - if not more than - intensively. It is a good idea to discuss this principle with students.

* ***Principle 2: Students need to be engaged with what they are reading.***

Outside normal lesson time, when students are reading extensively, they should be involved in joyful reading - that is, we should try to help them get as much pleasure from it as possible. But during lessons, too, we will do our best to ensure that they are *engaged* with the topic of a reading text and the activities they are asked to do while dealing with it.

* ***Principle 3: Encourage students to respond to the content of a text (and explore their feelings  
  about it), not just concentrate on its construction.***

Of course, it is important for students to study reading texts in class in order to find out such things as the way they use language, the number of paragraphs they contain and how many times they use relative clauses. But the meaning, the message of the text, is just as important as this. As a result, we must give students a chance to respond to that message in some way. It is especially important that they should be allowed to show their feelings about the topic - thus provoking personal engagement with it and the language. With extensive reading this is even more important. Reading for pleasure is - and should be - different from reading for study.

***Principle 4: Prediction is a major factor in reading.***

When we read texts in our own language, we frequently have a good idea of the content before we actually start reading. Book covers give us a clue about what is in the book; photographs and headlines hint at what articles are about; we can identify reports as reportsfrom their appearance before we read a single word. The moment we get these clues – the book cover, the headline, the web-page banner - our brain starts predicting what we are going to read. Expectations are set up and the active process of reading is ready to begin. In class, teachers should give students ‘hints’ so that they also have a chance to predict what is coming. In the case of extensive reading - when students are choosing what to read for pleasure - we should encourage them to look at covers and back cover copy to help them select what to read and then to help them ‘get into’ a book.

* ***Principle 5: Match the task to the topic when using intensive reading texts.***

Once a decision has been taken about what reading text the students are going to read (based on their level, the topic of the text and its linguistic and activation potential), we need to choose good reading **tasks** - the right kind of questions, appropriate activities before during and after reading, and useful study exploitation, etc.

The most useful and interesting text can be undermined by boring and inappropriate tasks; the most commonplace passage can be made really exciting with imaginative and challenging activities, especially if the **level of challenge** (i.e. how easy it is for students to complete a task) is exactly right for the class.

* ***Principle 6: Good teachers exploit reading texts to the full.***

Any reading text is full of sentences, words, ideas, descriptions, etc. It doesn’t make sense, in class, just to get students to read it and then drop it and move on to something else.  
Good teachers integrate the reading text into interesting lesson sequences, using the topic for discussion and further tasks, using the language for study and then activation (or, of course, activation and then study) and using a range of activities to bring the text to life. Where students have been doing extensive reading, we should use whatever opportunities present themselves to provoke useful feedback.

**6. Reading suggestions  
6.1.Jigsaw reading**

Students read a short text which sets up a problem and then, in three groups, they read three different texts, all of which are about the same thing (different aspects of behaviour such as anger, or different reports on a problem, or different parts of a story or strange event). When they have read their texts, they come together in groups where each student has read a different text, and they try to work out the whole story, or describe the whole situation. JoAnn Miller’s UFO webquest employs jigsaw reading on a large scale, but it is still a highly motivating technique, despite - or perhaps because of - the time it takes. Above all, this kind of jigsaw technique gives students a reason for reading - and then sharing what they have found out.

**6.2.Reading puzzles**

Apart from jigsaw reading, there are many other kinds of puzzle which involve students in motivating reading tasks. For example, we can give them texts which have been chopped up so that each paragraph is on a different piece of paper. We can give students a series of emails between two people which are out of sequence. The students have to work out the order of the emails. We can mix up two stories and students have to prise them apart

**6.3.Using newspapers**

There is almost no limit to the kinds of activity which can be done with newspapers (or their online equivalents). We can do all kinds of **matching exercises,** such as ones where students have to match articles with their headlines or with relevant pictures. At higher levels, we can have students read three accounts of the same incident and ask them to find the differences between them. We can use newspaper articles as a stimulus for speaking or writing (students can write letters in reply to what they read).

We can ask students to read small ads (advertisements) for holidays, partners,things for sale, etc, in order to make a choice about which holiday, person or thing they would choose. Later, they can use their choices to role-play descriptions, contact the service providers or say what happened when they made their choice.

We can get students to read the letters page from a newspaper and try to imagine what the writers look like, and what kinds of lives they have. They can reply to the letters.

**6.4.Following instructions:**

Students read instructions for a simple operation (using a public phonebox, etc) and have to put the instructions in the correct order. They might also match instructions about, for example, unpacking a printer or inserting a new ink cartridge with the little pictures that normally accompany such instructions in manuals. We can also get students to read instructions in order to follow them.  
 Recipes are a particular kind of instruction genre, but can be used in much the same way as the examples above - e.g. students read a recipe and match the instructions with pictures. We can then get them to cook the food!

**6.5**. **Play extracts**

Students read an extract from a play or film and, after ensuring that they understand it and analysing its construction, they have to work on acting it out. This means thinking about how lines are said, concentrating on stress, intonation, speed,etc.  
 We can use many different text genres for this kind of activity since reading aloud - a speaking skill - is only successful when students have really studied a text, worked out what it means, and thought about how to make sense of it when it is spoken.

**6.6. Predicting from words and pictures**

Students are given a number of words from a text. Working in groups, they have to predict what kind of a text they are going to read - or what story the text tells. They then read the text to see if their original predictions were correct. We don’t have to give them individual words, of course.

We can give them whole phrases and get them to try to make a story using them. For example, the phrases ‘knock on the door’, ‘Go away!’, ‘They find a man the next morning’, ‘He is dead’, ‘James is in the lighthouse’ will help students to predict (perhaps wrongly, of course!) some kind of story about a lighthouse keeper, some sort of threat and a dead person. (They then read a ghost story with these phrases in it.) .We can also give students pictures to predict from, or slightly bigger fragments from the text.

**6.7.Different responses**

There are many things students can do with a reading text apart from answering comprehension questions with sentences, saying whether something is true or false or finding particular words in the text. For example, when a text is full of facts and figures, we can get students to put the information into graphs, tables or diagrams. We can also ask them to describe the people in the text (where no physical description is given).

This will encourage them to visualise what they are reading. We can let students read stories, but leave off the ending for them to guess.

Alternatively, they can read stories in stages, stopping every now and then to predict what will happen next.  
 At higher levels, we can get students to infer the writer’s attitude from a text. We can also get the students involved in **genre analysis** - where they look at the construction of a number of different examples of, say, magazine advertisements in order to work out how they are typically constructed.

**7.Encouraging students to read extensively** If, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, we want students to read extensively, using simplified readers at pre-advanced levels, then we need to have systems in place to help them do this. There are four factors which contribute to the success of this kind of extensive reading:  
**7.1..Library** Students need to have access to a collection of readers, both at their own level and above and below it. Sometimes the library will be in a fixed place in a school, but we can also carry collections of books around to different classes. The library should have a range of different genres (factual, novels, adaptations of films, etc).  
**7.2.Choice** A major aspect of joyful reading (see page 99) is that students should be able to choose what they read - both in terms of genre but also, crucially, level. They are much more likely to read with enthusiasm if they have made the decision about what they read.  
**7.3.Feedback** Students should have an opportunity to give feedback on what they have read, either verbally or in written form. This does not mean formal reports, however, since that might take the pleasure away from reading. Instead, there might be a quick comment form on the inside cover of a book, or a folder with different forms for different titles. Students can then record their reactions to a book they have read. Other students looking for a new book to read can use those comments to help them make their choice.

**7.4.Time** We need to give students time for reading in addition to those occasions when they read on their own. It is a good idea to leave a ten-minute reading period at various times during a course just to get students comfortable with the activity. It is vitally important that when we do this, we should be reading ourselves in order to underline the attractiveness of the activity.  
 Not all students become active readers. While some are highly motivated and consume books avidly, others don’t have the same appetite. We can’t force students to read, of course, but we should do everything we can to encourage them to do so.

“*Reading well is one of the great pleasures that solitude can afford you*.” — Harold Bloom