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STRATEGIES FOR LETTING THE REAL WORLD IN: READING ONLINE

The main task of every teacher of English is to provide the students with an introduction to real-life English language use. Some strategies can be mentioned to break down the classroom walls and let the real world in:

1) Understand learner's backgrounds and abilities – to create the possibility for students to talk about themselves and talk their opinions freely.

2) Use authentic materials – “materials that have not been designed especially for language learners and which therefore do not have contrived or simplified language” [3].

3) Bring current topics and global issues into the classroom - we can also make them aware of their own assumptions and biases, and perhaps encourage them to be more inclusive, as they learn to use English in this very diverse world”

4) Develop reading and writing skills that are relevant in our current scenario

Reading strategies:

- Recognizing implicit meaning in short sentences
- Understanding headlines
- Recognizing click baits and possible scams
- Distinguishing facts from opinions
- Identifying bias in the author's words
- Recognizing incendiary language
- Fact-checking using different sources

Writing strategies:

- Conveying meaning in very short texts
- Using emojis, gifs and stickers appropriately
- Typing using predictive text
- Communicating in a non-violent or aggressive tone
- Asking for opinion in a non-threatening way

5) Ask students to do things they will actually do in the real world - some day our students won't be in our classroom. The teacher should make sure that he is preparing them to be independent learners and manipulators of language out there [3].

6) Expose students to different varieties of English - make sure you've exposed them to a wide range of accents both native and non-native.

Obviously there are many reading skills which can be developed in the classroom, such as skimming, scanning, and identifying grammar structures and vocabulary in context. However, working on these skills means that our students do not actually spend that much time actually *reading*. In order to fill this gap, therefore, it is always a good idea to try to motivate them to read more in their own time. In this article I want to describe how we can do this by sending students online articles to support their classroom work.

There are several benefits to getting students to read in their own time. Here are some of them:

Firstly, by reading more, students can improve their reading speed. Olwyn Alexander and her colleagues assert that the average native speaker of English reads at 300 words per minute (wpm), whereas many English language students can only manage 60 wpm. By reading as much as possible, students are able to increase their speed of word recognition.

Secondly, students can improve their vocabulary by reading. Patricia Carrell and William Grabe summarised that a learner would need a vocabulary of around 5,000 words in order to read for pleasure, but at least 10,000 words to study at university [2,

p.57] . Reading in quantity will help students extend their vocabulary, understand words in context and cope with different forms of words.

Thirdly, they can practice reading longer texts to increase their reading stamina and to improve their global reading skills, such as understanding the wider meaning of a text. This is essential for students who need English for higher or further education.

Fourthly, free-time reading can ensure improvements in general language ability by giving learners the possibility to move from intermediate to more advanced levels of proficiency.

Finally, reading in their free time can ensure improvements in students' exam results on tests such as IELTS and FCE.

Christopher Green believes that reading done in a student's free time, when combined with classwork, can greatly influence their linguistic development. If the free-time reading follows the same theme as the classwork, students can repeat and reinforce vocabulary, and think about the topic from a different point of view [1; 41].

A great way to do this is to send them weekly links to between two and four online articles which support the contents of that day's or week's lessons. For example, if our topic of the week was the environment, I would send my students links to some articles connected with this theme - perhaps a news item on climate change, an article on attempts to counter deforestation, etc. These links could be sent via email or by using an online environment like *Viber*, or even *Facebook* as many of my students have *Facebook* accounts.

Here are some ideas for using online articles in order to support classwork.

1) The texts taken from the internet can be used as the basis for classroom discussion. For example, the students receive links to two texts: one putting the case for the reality of global warming and one more sceptical about it. They are asked to read the articles and come to the next lesson prepared to discuss their responses. Alternatively, the students could read hard-copy versions of the texts in the

classroom and then, in groups, orally summarise what they have read. One student from each group could then present the main points of their article to the rest of the class.

2) Students complete a diary, noting down what and how much they read every day. As well as recording the online articles, they can also include anything else they might have read. The contents of the diary could then be used to promote discussion.

3) Students are sent links to the texts and are simply asked to read them. They are told that if they read them, this will support their classwork. However, they are not obliged to do this.

If a teacher wants to adapt the text to suite his students, he might consider the following:

1. Focusing on vocabulary - As previously mentioned, building student vocabulary is incredibly important. Therefore, a teacher could focus on the words highlighted by Oxford 3000 in class and then use the text to support this.

2. Editing the text - This would mean either replacing the highlighted words with synonyms or rewriting the text completely.

3. Self-study – The teacher could show the students how to operate the text checker websites themselves so they could use them for self-study. The information supplied would indicate to the students which words they will need to look up in their dictionaries and which words they should already know.

Sending the students online texts, with or without support, is extremely motivating as students are dealing with authentic, 'real' English and understanding it: they will get a boost from knowing that they are reading articles written for native speakers. Furthermore, many students do most of their reading online anyway, and will be more willing to read something from their computer than from an A4 handout with the word *Homework* at the top.

REFERENCES

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