

AN APPROACH TO INDIVIDUAL READING

Elaine Borges Ribeiro - UFU

Introduction

Our course is given to Engineering students in the "básico" level and is now an optional subject. For this reason there has been a change in students' motivation. We have noticed that they have demonstrated more interest in class and consequently they are participating more.

According to Scott (1983), we also want to develop the ability of deep reading in our students. This ability involves the reader's thinking skills, critical analysis and application of the text contents to the reader's life.

By deep reading we do not mean intensive reading; our exercises are aimed at developing main points comprehension.

We have observed that what we have done in class goes beyond the written exercises in our materials. Then we decided to introduce a set of activities called "Atividade Padrão" (Standard Activities) that can suit many texts and, when desired, can be used in different moments of the class.

Previously, the students did not have a written study guide to work at home. For this reason, we also

decided to create "Individual Reading Activities". When we prepared this type of activity, we had in mind the aim of giving the students a series of follow-up exercises, written in Portuguese, to be worked at home. We believe they are of great advantage: the gap of our written materials could be covered this way, the students would have an opportunity to read extra texts and improve their reading ability as well as their vocabulary. Furthermore, the students would have the possibility to work on their own pace taking the best advantage of each activity.

Description of the Materials

In this paper the Individual Reading Activities numbers 1 and 2 (see Appendices 1 and 2) will be discussed simultaneously with reference to their respective numbers.

The first activity is based on prediction. In the section for objectives stated in Holmes (1982), prediction mentally prepares the class for the text, encourages the student to think about the topic, interesting them in the text they are going to read.

In the second activity we combine Holmes' stages two and three: general comprehension and main points comprehension. The students skim the text to obtain a general idea of the content and then identify the main parts of the text. The reminders given in this activity (Appendix 2) are aimed at encouraging the reader to go on without stopping every time a new word appears.

Sometimes the students do not give importance to non-verbal information or do not know that it can bring extra information to the text. In activity 3 (Appendix 1) we want to call the students attention to this aspect and develop their ability to analyse the way this kind of information can improve their reading comprehension. And the third activity in appendix 2 analyses the implicit meaning of a "discourse marker" and the implication it brings to the development of the text.

Next we come to another point of special importance: if the reader is interested only in main points comprehension and if he knows how to identify topic-sentences, he will save a lot of time by concentrating his reading on more important and objective information. So we have given the students activities which aim at identifying topic-sentences as shown in Appendix 1.

Equally important is the need the students have to develop the ability of critical reading because their general reaction when reading is to accept everything said in the text as true, without discussion. As we can see, in a scientific text the author can be sometimes subjective as the expression in Activity 4 of Appendix 1 ("it is obvious that"...) indicates.

In the fifth activity the students are requested to ask questions about the subject of the text. Our aim is to give them some freedom to choose the aspects they think are

more relevant and work on them (see Scott 1983). This activity also makes the students work in a different way with the text, that is, asking questions about a topic makes them reflect on their own comprehension.

In this last activity each student is asked to do a self-evaluation of his work as a reader. This means the students are incentivated to reflect on their own way of reading and also on their attitude towards the reading process.

Discussion

This kind of proposal comes from a reflection on what happens in our classroom and on what happens to our students, here considered as readers.

Besides working with the product of the students comprehension, that is, answering questions, finding information, we also want to focus on the way the students read. This kind of approach, we think, is much more challenging. As stated by Alderson (1982), many reading comprehension exercises do not teach students how to read; on the contrary, they test their comprehension. Those exercises do not help very much because students are not taught how to comprehend a text.

In our activities we have also tried to develop meaningful reading strategies, which may later lead to the product of reading, that is the comprehension or the

comprehension questions. This is an attempt to work on the reading process. We are not interested only in getting correct and well elaborated answers from our students. Our aim is to get the students more involved, make them find their own means of understanding, and make them reflect on what they are doing in order to understand a reading passage.

In this case, the teacher acts as a coordinator, leaving the students free to find their own way of dealing with a text, and improve their reading ability.

Up to the moment, the students' reactions have been favourable; and we expect that by putting in practice this kind of approach, besides working with our materials, we succeed in getting our main objective, that is, help our students be better readers.

References

1. ALDERSON, J.C. (1982) "Reading Seminar" given in the ESPTT Course. University of Lancaster, England.
2. ALDERSON, J.C. (1980) "Projects in Material Design" - Special Issue of ELT Document. Published by British Council.
3. HOLMES, J. (1982) Working Papers nº 4: "Stages, Strategies and Activities". PUC, São Paulo.
4. SCOTT, M. (1983) The ESpecialist nº 7: Report on the workshops on "Exercise-Types for EAP Reading Comprehension". PUC, São Paulo.

Appendix 1

Individual Reading Activity (1)

1. This text is about "Production of Petroleum in the world". Considering the title and before reading the text, specify at least three topics that you would like to know about the subject:

2. After a general reading of the text, analyse the way the author distributed the information along the paragraphs, that is, the text general structure, taking into account, for example:

2.1. What are the main parts of the text? How did you identify these parts?

TEXT Production of Petroleum in the World
--

3. Analyse the non-verbal aspects of the text and try to associate them with the textual information:

3.1. Do these aspects add or repeat information of the text content?

What kind of information?

3.2. What is the role of these non-verbal aspects in relation to the content of the text?

4. Authors often concentrate the information of a topic in the first or last sentence of a paragraph or part: read the first or last sentences of each main part of the text in order to identify the topic-sentence of each one. Number them and indicate the lines where they can be found.
5. Now, read the text again and ask three questions about the subject:
 - Discuss the possible answers with a classmate and say how you found them.
6. In line 5, the abbreviation MT/Y means _____.
7. Taking into account the work you have done so far, answer the questions:
 - 7.1. In your opinion, how did your previous knowledge of the subject affect your reading?

Appendix 2

Individual Reading Activity (2)

1. This text is about "Electric Power Systems."
Considering the title and before reading the text, specify at least three topics you think that will be included in the text.

TEXT

Electric Power Systems

2. Read the text quickly making use of the following notes:

2.1. read trying to develop your ability to recognize key-words, that is, important words for your comprehension.

2.2. in this first reading, do not give importance to unknown words.

2.3. note how the general structure of the text can facilitate your comprehension of the meaning in this text.

- Discuss the application of the procedures above in group.

3. In line 30, the expression "IN ORDER TO" expresses the idea of _____.

4. Identify two examples of information (objective and subjective) in the text:

4.1. line(s) _____ 4.2. line(s) _____

5. Now, read the text again in order to ask three questions about the subject:

- Discuss the possible answers with a classmate and say how you found them.

6. Taking into account the work you have done so far, answer the questions:

6.1. Do you think you understood the text?

6.2. Do you think you can apply some of the ideas in your own academic studies?

Appendix 3

Teacher's Notes

1. Each activity is given after two units and the students should do it at home.
2. After answering all the questions they work in pairs in class. Each student asks a classmate his/her questions and the teacher supervises the work.
3. The principal points of difficulty can be then discussed by the whole group, having the teacher as a coordinator.