

MAIN PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING READING

Liudmyla Voinalovych (Zhytomyr, Ukraine)

Reading is a receptive language activity, but not a passive skill. 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. While teaching reading we should observe the following 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.

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.

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.

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 reports from their appearance before we read a single word. The moment we get these clues 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.

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.

References

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