

Sound Bites for Better Teaching: *Reading as a Springboard for Communication*

Marcel LaVergne Ed.D.



Read to Learn



Read for Pleasure

Of the four language skills, reading is an activity that one usually does alone in some quiet area with no interaction with anyone. We read for the pleasure of it or to obtain information. Some look up every word that they don't know and others either skip over the words or try to guess their meaning from the context. However, in an L2 classroom, reading usually becomes a vehicle for learning new vocabulary, seeing grammar rules being properly applied, or for learning the L2 culture. In addition students are often led in group reading-aloud exercises to practice correct pronunciation and articulation. They then engage in low-level thinking skills activities as comprehension checks of the reading text, i.e., question/answer, true/false, multiple choice, etc. In extreme cases, they become translation activities. In so doing, reading can become a tedious and boring activity unless one uses reading as a way to develop speaking fluency in the students, as a springboard for topics of conversation. What students can do as a result of the reading becomes more important than what students know about the reading.

Self Evaluation (no right or wrong answers)

How knowledgeable are you of the reading skills process? Do you know the difference between top-down, bottom-up, or interactive reading strategies?

Do you plan your reading lesson according to the 5 reading skills stages?

Before assigning a reading text, do you engage in any pre-reading activities to determine what the students might know about the topic?

Do you engage the students in skimming and/or scanning activities? Do you know the difference?

After checking for comprehension, do you engage the students in creative activities such as "What would you do in a similar situation?" or "Can you imagine a different ending to the story?" or "Can you find any evidence of C1-C2 differences?"

Have you ever asked the students to recreate a comic strip version or a dramatic presentation of the story?

Do you use reading as a source of conversation topics by eliciting their opinion, their reaction, or their likes or dislikes vis-à-vis what they have just read?

Have you ever given the students some quiet reading time in class so that they could read something of their choice? If so, what do you expect in return as proof of what they have learned?

Do you pair any cooperative learning activities with the reading lessons as a way to develop the students' communicative abilities?

TIP

When planning a reading lesson, in addition to comprehension-type activities that test just the facts, plan at least two activities designed to elicit the students' personal reactions to the reading: What have you learned that you didn't know? Which was your favorite character and why? Has anything like that ever happened to you? Would you like to visit that place? Why or Why not?