

The Importance of using Authentic Materials to Develop Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: The importance of real materials and resources that English language teachers can use today—from online teaching resources to textbooks—to support and enhance English classes is covered in this graduation project. In order to expose students to the language as it is used in everyday situations, many educators incorporate authentic English content into their classes. Anything written in English that was not intended for use in an English language classroom is considered authentic material.

Keywords: authentic, fluency, reading, vocabulary, monotony, verbal, non-verbal.

INTRODUCTION

Authentic materials support literary comprehension and analysis because it fulfills its natural function as a language, instead of introducing language as artificial and discrete elements. The Input Hypothesis Theory states that authentic materials are more comprehensible, and therefore have a greater communicative value compared to simplified or independent texts. Within the realm of academic language use, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) suggests that teachers should introduce language that is context related through authentic materials, and not simplified language. Through authentic materials, learners are also able to demonstrate the ability to use the knowledge of phonics cues and reading strategies. In a research done by Aftab, 100 second grade learners were divided into a literature based group, and commercial phonics based group. The learners' comprehension of reading materials and strategies were examined using miscue analysis procedures by Goodman, Watson, and Burke (1987).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Learners were audiotaped reading aloud, and data were derived from these read aloud sessions to determine the miscue percentages and retelling ability of learners. Before the study was conducted, learners were told to read in a manner that was consistent to when they were reading alone. Recalling materials were two part: learners were first asked to recall without interruption, and then according to questions provided by the teacher. The aim of the study was to examine learner's proficiency regarding the integration of language cues (syntactic, semantic, phonics, and so on), reading strategies (prediction, self correction) and comprehension (analysis of cohesion and logical sequencing). The results indicated that learners in the literature based classroom used multiple cues to comprehend the texts, learned phonics within a meaningful context and focused on constructing meaning through reading strategies, corrections and recalls when immersed in a literacy rich environment.

In contrast, the study found that learners in the commercial based program, which emphasized systematic and explicit phonic instruction, did not show significantly better performance compared to the literature based group; in fact, these learners were statistically less willing to

take risks, accepting instead to read meaningless texts. These learners also read controlled texts and answered questions with a single correct answer instead of multiple divergent answers. In comparison, learners in the literature based program were interacting with the text, immersed in rich discussion and attempted to make sense of the text, occasionally focusing on graphophonic cues but not relying solely on this reading component.

These learners were able to process both the surface and deeper aspects of language, and were thus able to grasp text and word level meaning, allowing them to develop into independent readers. Provides Natural Language. Through literature based instruction, students are exposed to a broader range of grammatical constructs that are generally used in natural discourse and provide real examples, including normal redundancy that present learners with familiar language chunks used. Because of the authentic nature of these learning materials, students are exposed to a vocabulary that is both rich and natural. In a study by Ivey and Broaddus, the researchers noted in a research log (dated April 26, 2004) the progress of one student which, in his participation with this study, not only read fluently, but comprehend the material well. Each sentence he read was concluded with the meaning of the last word. The study found how important repeated exposure is toward building learner fluency and vocabulary, using words in multiple contexts, but without the monotony of drills. When producing their own independent writing, learners can reflect the variety of literary features acquired through authentic materials.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Authentic materials also contain a large number of cohesive devices that increase the cogency of these texts, making them easier to decode and comprehend compared to simplified or stand alone texts. A cohesive tie, which is a natural part of authentic discourse, is a vital tool used in processing information and building reading comprehension skills in L2 learners. In a study by Oller (2005), the researcher advocates the use of “pi” bootstrapping a hypothesis which suggest that comprehension and acquisition of the ability to refer to content material and construct highly complex target form are essential in learning a new language. This theory proves the validity of authentic materials used in L2 acquisition, through providing different sentence structures to subjects, who identified certain sentences through logical sequencing, thus increasing comprehensibility. “...Measures of priming effects, reading times, coherent rating and retention all confirm the prediction of the pi – bootstrapping hypothesis: The more coherent the storyline, (language) is processed more fluently and remembered better than less well connected sequence”.

A motivated reader will “activate prior knowledge to construct new understanding”. It is also claimed that the development of literacy (obtained from reading texts) and motivated students is “a reciprocal relationship...”; the better you get at understanding the texts you read, the more motivated you will become. This will encourage you to engage in the reading of more texts with an increasing difficulty level. Reading leads to a better textual understanding which in turn inspires you to read further.

So the trick should be to get the students interested in texts to get them motivated in the process of working with texts within and outside the classroom language skills need to be introduced alongside academic content, in order to ensure the achievement of fluency before learners lose interest or slip into resignation. Literature based instruction not only helps familiarize learners with the subject matter, but more importantly, allows them to use English to communicate the content matter. Students’ motivation level increases when they see the language in which they are learning reflected in daily conversation between family, friends and in school. The practice of using literature based instruction in the classroom has received favorable response: Educators agree that teaching a language using authentic materials is academically sound.

Authentic material supports increased comprehension of texts through the use of authentic language input, and fulfills social and academic purpose. However, the authenticity of the materials might not serve the needs of students if the materials, which represent realistic communication, ignore or do not reflect the issues of the learners’ culture. Teaching a second

language might require more than just authentic materials in addressing the educational needs of immigrant language learners; incorporating culturally relevant materials will be an additional aspect within authentic materials that might be necessary to increase student achievement and participation. Culturally Relevant Materials. Culturally relevant texts contain the aspect of cultural diversity and shared experiences set by its characters that reflect the lives and identities of its readers. Because language and cultural identity are inseparable, opportunities for learners to explore bilingual and bicultural identities in reading materials are crucial for literary success.

CONCLUSION

Young learners whose culture and beliefs are excluded from books and literature learn that they have no part as valued members of a society (Bishop, 1987). The National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning released a study entitled the Pacific Northwest Indian Reading and Language Development Program. It was created to develop a culturally relevant reading curriculum for first through third grade learners. The teachers had transcribed oral stories told by Native American students and used these stories as reading texts. Researchers observed that there was an increase in students' oral language production and language complexity when compared to the study's baseline. Data and observations collected throughout the academic year revealed that gains were most noticeable within the group of learners who, through pre test scores, were identified as "non verbal". The benefits of using culturally relevant materials also extend into the home environment of the learners, where parents viewed the materials as useful and relevant, thus increasing language related activities in the home. This supports Butterfield (1983)'s claim that culturally appropriate curriculum for American Indian students does affect students' language learning, as learners receive support both in school and at home.

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