

A Guide to Teaching Reading Explained Using a Lesson About Coffee

<http://www.tesol.org>
Sergio Lopez Medina
slopedra@demina.udea.edu.co
Universidad de Antioquia (Medellin, Colombia)

Dwy & Bamford (2000) argue that reading is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts the construction of meaning has to be guided by the teacher. This article highlights the importance of developing reading activities when EFL teachers work with readings.

Introduction

In order to guide students to use helpful strategies when they read in a foreign language, the teacher can guide them by designing tasks or activities. Tasks or activities are exercises in which there is an objective to reach and there are exercises intended to facilitate learning.

Activities

When designing tasks for students, one of the most recommended routines is to design tasks that follow the format of pre-reading activities, while-reading activities and post-reading activities.

Pre-reading Activities

These tasks are intended to construct background knowledge. The teacher becomes a bridge builder between what students already know about a concept - schemas - and what they need to know in order to understand a particular text, that is, the interaction between those schemas and the input coming from the text.

Pre-reading tasks are intended to prepare the learners for a reading selection, or to give them the first steps in order to develop skills in anticipation and prediction for the reading, activating background knowledge so they could later interact with the text. With these tasks, teachers give students meaningful pieces of information that they would encounter in the reading.

While-reading Activities

The aims of this stage are to help students to understand the specific content and to perceive the rhetorical structure of the text (Cohen-Marcia, 1991). With these tasks teachers take the learners through the reading and they interact in the text.

Post-Reading Activities

Post-reading tasks are intended to verify and expand the knowledge acquired in the reading. These last tasks also lead the learners to discuss and analyze issues presented in the reading.

Post-activities are tasks in which learners, after interacting with the reading, reflect, argue and give their points of view.

Authentic Material

Although textbooks reading materials may be appropriate for language students, it is also good for learners to be challenged with authentic materials. Authentic materials are materials written by native writers for native readers.

Examples of Pre-reading Activities

Activity 1. Choose the best answer.

How many cups of coffee do you think a day?

- a. Between 1 and 2 cups
- b. Between 3 and 4 cups
- c. Between 5 and 6 cups
- d. More than 6 cups

What kind of people should not drink coffee?

- a. Pregnant women, children, people with coronary heart disease or peptic ulcers
- b. Teachers, students, people who practice sports
- c. Sick people, adult people, people who have problems to sleep
- d. Dentists, dentists, patients, and people who are on a diet

What foods contain caffeine?

- a. Chocolate
- b. Tea
- c. Some soft drinks
- d. All of the above

Activity 2. Answer the following questions. What do you think the answers are?

- a. What is caffeine?

- b. What are the negative effects of drinking coffee?

- c. What are the positive effects of drinking coffee?

- d. How is caffeine related to health problems?

Activity 3. Tick (✓) the words or expressions that you think coffee involves.

- ___ anxiety ___ sleep disorder ___ central nervous system stimulant
- ___ energy ___ raises the temperature in the body ___ helps migraine headaches
- ___ reduces the effects of alcohol ___ some medication may contain caffeine ___ it tastes good

Add others:

Examples of While-reading Activities

Activity 4. Read the article that is below and answer these questions.

- a. What is the concept of caffeine?

- b. What are the negative effects of caffeine?

- c. What are the positive effects of caffeine?

- d. How many cups of coffee should a child drink?

- e. What is a moderate coffee drinker?

Activity 5. Mark True (T) or False (F) based on the reading.

- ___ Some doctors use caffeine as a social problem.
- ___ Coffee helps to heat the body of a person.
- ___ Caffeine has a fast process in the body.
- ___ Caffeine may be used as medication because it helps to cure migraine headaches, fatigue or drowsiness.
- ___ If you only drink three cups of coffee daily you may not have health problems.
- ___ If you stop drinking coffee suddenly you will not have health symptoms.
- ___ If a child drinks coffee he/she may have some health problems.

Decide in caffeine may lead to hospitalization.

Activity 6. Number the events as they appear in the reading.

- ___ The article gives evidence that some people have studied caffeine.
- ___ Some examples of food containing caffeine are presented.
- ___ The article gives a guide for excess intake of caffeine.
- ___ Some examples of food containing amount of caffeine are presented.
- ___ The article mentions some people who should not drink coffee.
- ___ Some symptoms are given.
- ___ A definition is given.
- ___ An idea of moderate intake of coffee is given.

Examples of Post-reading Activities

Activity 7. Write a short summary of the reading.

Activity 8. Think of the different foods or medication you have every day, which ones contain caffeine?

How much caffeine is there in these items?

Activity 9. Read the following and support your argument based on the reading and your points of view.

Richard is 12 years old and practices basketball three times a week. He loves drinking a cup of coffee before practicing it; could he have any health problems?

The Reading

Caffeine

Caffeine can lead to a condition known as caffeineism if large amounts, and especially over extended periods of time are taken. Although a lot of Americans use caffeine just few people face social problems. Some doctors agree that caffeine intoxication may lead to physical and mental conditions including nervousness, irritability, anxiety, insomnia headaches among others.

Caffeine is a common ingredient for soft drinks such as colas. Also, other products such as chocolate, tea, energy drinks, shampoo, soap and even medication may contain some. Caffeine is a central nervous system and metabolic stimulant and it is used both occasionally and medically to reduce physical fatigue and restore mental alertness when unusual weakness or drowsiness occurs. Nevertheless, some people think that caffeine can help to sober up a drunk person or to heat a hypothermia victim but fast heating or acceleration of cold temperatures on the body may occur.

Here are some products with the amount of caffeine:

- Soft drinks typically contain about 30 to 50 milligrams of caffeine per serving
- Red Bull contains as much as 80 milligrams of caffeine per serving
- one serving of coffee ranges from 40 milligrams to about 100 milligrams for a cup
- one serving of tea ranges from 20 milligrams to about 100 milligrams for a cup
- cocoa may contain 4 milligrams per cup

Symptoms

The absorption and distribution of caffeine is quickly in the body, but the body does not store it. It takes less than an hour for caffeine to begin affecting the body and a mild dose wears off in three to four hours. Caffeine does not diminish the alcohol level on a person but it can be used as treatment for some health problems such as migraine or fatigue. In large amounts, caffeine can cause the heart to beat fast, irritability, insomnia, numbness, depression, headaches, and peptic ulcers.

The stimulating effects of caffeine are caused by a central nervous reaction. The heart rate increases, blood vessels expand and the brain receives more oxygen. Birth defects and behavior in children are examples of studies researchers have made. Caffeine tolerance develops very quickly, especially among heavy coffee and energy drink consumers. Complete tolerance to sleep disruption effects of caffeine develops after consuming 400 mg of caffeine. Thus, about 250 to 350 mg of caffeine daily (three cups of coffee) can be considered a moderate amount in order to avoid health problems.

Always withdrawal may lead to cause symptoms such as headaches, irritability, nausea, and others. It is a good idea to reduce caffeine intake gradually in order to prevent symptoms of withdrawal.

Recommendations

Moderate caffeine intake may not lead to health problems. There is no scientific evidence for the mistaken but common belief that caffeine consumption causes stunted growth in children. However, as with adults, nausea, urinary urgency, nervousness, or other effects from an elevated caffeine intake via chocolate milk, soda, cold medicines, iced tea, coffee and other products that are widely used, may be reasons to limit the amount of caffeine that is consumed each day in children.

It is recommended that pregnant women should limit their caffeine intake to less than 300 mg of caffeine a day - the equivalent of 2.5 cups of coffee a day. A higher intake may be associated with miscarriage.

Reading taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caffeine>, adapted by Sergio Lopez Medina.

Conclusion

It is a good idea to guide EFL learners through tasks or activities. When the teacher follows the format of pre-activity, while-activity and post activity and uses authentic material, the learner may have a better and real interaction with the reading.

References

- Cohen-Marcia, M. (1991). Teaching English as a second or foreign language. New York: Newbury House.
- Dwy, R. & Bamford, J. (2000). Extensive reading in the second language classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stans, D. (1989). Designing tasks for the communicative classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubin, J. and Thompson, L. (1994). How to be a more successful language learner. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publisher.
- wikipedia Caffeine. Retrieved May 21, 2008 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caffeine>