

Bringing Reading to Life. Tips for Vitalizing Reading in Primary School

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Abstract

This article explores the way in which reading can be brought to life in the English lessons starting from the roles of the teacher in intensive reading and going on with examples of activities through which we can bring reading to life. The roles of the teacher in intensive reading are: organiser of reading sessions, observer of the students' reading, feedback organiser and encourager. In primary school, reading can be brought to life by using toy animals when starting a reading activity and by expressing through words and gestures what we read. Both these techniques will be exemplified in this article. Of course, there are also other ways of vitalizing reading at all levels of study, which will be explored in future studies.

Reading is a key factor in developing students' language skills. This is why the way we set up reading is very important. It could bring reading to life and motivate the students, or, in some situations, it could have the opposite effect, blocking the students on their way to knowledge and development. In order to make reading bring something in the students' soul, help them to evolve, the students must be involved in intensive reading, which takes place in the classroom, in foreign languages lessons, but also in extensive reading programmes, which take place outside the lessons, on a theme which is chosen by the students, a theme which the students will read out of curiosity or pleasure, not because it was imposed by somebody. The present study is focused on intensive reading, on the way in which reading could be brought to life in the English lessons, starting from the roles of the teacher in intensive reading and going on with examples of activities through which we bring reading to life.

How can we vitalize reading in primary school?

When teaching reading it is very important to take on different roles. We must tell our students the goal of reading, give instructions on achieving the goal and explain how much time they have for this.

The roles of the teacher in intensive reading

Organiser of reading sessions

In order to make the students read with enthusiasm, we must create interest in the subject and in the tasks. One way of creating interest is by using toys, especially toy animals. Toys can be used directly, by bringing them to class for different activities or indirectly, by presenting photographs of them. Toy animals are very efficient for teaching English. The students remember very well what the animal said or did. So, toy animals are very useful for communication in a foreign language which becomes more pleasant.

Observer of students' reading

In teaching English I frequently used toy elephants as teaching assistants. (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Talking to the elephants reduced the students' anxiety of an unknown text in a foreign language. As I noticed, after introducing the students in the topic of the lesson with the help of the toy elephants, they were very engaged in the lesson and eager to read the new text.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Feedback organiser

Jerry (See Fig. 3) was of a real help in primary school. He was useful for checking homework. The primary school students couldn't wait to show Jerry that they did their homework. Jerry offered constructive feedback. If some students forgot to do their homework, Jerry kindly invited them to bring it in the next day. The students came with their homework the next time they had English and couldn't wait to impress Jerry with their notebooks with the homework done.



Fig.3

Jerry was also used for checking comprehension after reading a text. The primary school students answered the comprehension questions as if they taught Jerry something that he didn't understand. In this way they practised reading comprehension and role playing.

Encourager

When students start reading for the first time, they often find it difficult. But, with proper help and encouragement, they do it better the next time and they don't lose their motivation. Toy animals proved to be very good motivators in primary school. They helped students to keep reading even if they didn't do it quite right the first time.

In primary school, reading can be brought to life if we express through words and gestures what we read. In this way, reading becomes theatre or play and movement, types of activities which are loved by students.

An example of turning reading into theatre is "The Gingerbread Man", a short and adapted version for primary school (See Annex). This activity involved turning the story "The Gingerbread Man" in a sketch. The students chose a representative person to be the gingerbread man. After choosing their gingerbread man, the students gathered in a circle and the gingerbread man was in the centre. The students interpreted all together grandma's words: "A head, two arms and two legs: a gingerbread man". When they said "A head", the students showed their head. They did the same when they said "two arms and two legs", showing their arms and legs. When they said "a gingerbread man", the students pointed to their colleague who was the gingerbread man. Then the students pointed to an imaginary oven and said: "Now in the oven and wait". The gingerbread man shouted: "Let me out! Let me out!". After a while,

the students let him out and another student came to the centre to be the gingerbread man. The procedure was repeated until every student was the gingerbread man.

The primary school students who were involved in this activity declared that they loved it. Role playing was beneficial for the students. It was an activity through which they developed their communication abilities in a pleasant way. The short version, which can be seen in Annex, could be interpreted either with the whole class, where one student represents the gingerbread man and the other students from the class represent grandma, interpreting everything that grandma says, as we could see above, or in pairs, where one student represents grandma who cooks and the other represents the gingerbread man, or in teams of two, three or more, where one team interprets grandma's role and the other represents the gingerbread man.

Of course, in secondary school and high school the activity can be made in a more complex way, with the whole story and with more characters.

The present study explored some ways in which reading can be taught in the English lessons, starting from the roles of the teacher in intensive reading and going on with examples of activities through which we bring reading to life. As the study showed, using toy animals at the beginning of a reading session proved to be beneficial for students. Turning the story "The Gingerbread Man" into theatre was an activity which made students love reading. There are also other ways of bringing reading to life which will be explored in future studies.

Bibliography

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Annex

The Gingerbread Man - Short Version

Grandma: "A head, two arms and two legs: a gingerbread man. Now, in the oven and wait!"

The Gingerbread Man: "Let me out! Let me out!"

Biodata

Ligia-Daniela Botiza has been teaching English in public schools for 12 years. She is currently working with primary, secondary and high school students and she is passionate about teaching English through songs and games, bringing reading to life and helping others to improve their communication skills. She has participated in courses, seminars and conferences in Cluj-Napoca, Bucharest and Iași. She has been involved in POSDRU projects: “Skills for Jobs”, POSDRU/160/2.1/s/141384 and “Împreună vom reuși”, POSDRU91/2.2/S/64054.