

ENGAGING CREATIVELY WITH LITERATURE IN AN INTEGRATED READING CLASS

Mega Wati

Duta Wacana Christian University

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at sharing a decade continuously-assessed-and-improved experience of engaging with literature creatively in a non-credit-but-compulsory reading class for the first year students of Theology Department, in which they are prepared so as to take the later credited subject of English for Theology. Triggered by the rare general reading materials relevant to the field of theology, the teaching team decided to turn to Reader's Digest articles. This magazine has several article sections dealing with life values that are universal and considered in line with the objective of the Department's Student Development Program in the hostel.

Making use of Donald Freeman's Teacher Source Exploring Second Language Reading—Issues and Strategies by Neil J. Anderson (1999), the Integrated Reading Class is designed to empower the students to comprehend English articles by making use of reading techniques such as scanning, skimming, SQ3R, DRTA, and KWL while learning to enhance their paradigm, values and character through the specifically chosen reading materials, combination of intensive and extensive reading, teaching methodology, and assessment.

Continuous studies conducted by the teachers and the participating students reveal and reinforce that the five reading techniques taught are very useful and helpful to improve the students' reading efficiency and effectivity; the reading materials chosen are appropriate to enhance their life values; the use of various teaching methodology are appreciated by the students; the teacher's modelling, personality, and teaching style are effective strategies for motivating; journal writing and self assessment are appropriate alternative assessments.

BACKGROUND

For long the Department of Theology in Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, has committed to enhance the students' English competence to support their (further) study and self development. Therefore, the first-year students are to take the noncredit-but-compulsory English class as much as 8 credit points at the most, depending on their entrance test result. Generally, the objective of this noncredit-but-compulsory English class is to equip them with the reading competence that will support their study in the department, while the short-term objective is to prepare them to take the credited subject of English for Theology.

Triggered by the rare general reading materials relevant to the field of theology, the teaching team decided to turn to Reader's Digest articles. This magazine has several article sections dealing with life values that are universal. Another material that the teachers selected for reading assignment in the later years is the book entitled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey (2004). These two materials are considered in line with the objective of the Department's Student Development Program in the hostel, and very relevant for sharpening the character of future pastors or community leaders. And so began the teachers' journey to work creatively with literature in a reading class.

While the material selection is settled down, another problem—or rather, challenge—remains: How are you going to teach reading as much as 8 credit points per semester for a year? It is commonly perceived that teaching reading is difficult, not only because of the demand to wisely select reading texts, but also because of another demand to creatively teach the students how to read effectively. In fact, these two major challenges prove to be the center of the teachers' efforts which in turn reward them with other lessons learned.

This paper aims at sharing a decade continuously-assessed-and-improved experience of engaging with literature creatively in a general reading class recently renamed Integrated Reading. The focus of this sharing will be the methodology occupied in teaching reading, so as to describe how the teachers engage **CREATIVELY** with literature. Therefore, several tried-out methods will be exposed. Moreover, however, other things such as general theoretical framework and valuable findings in relation to the use of the methodology will also be shared to maximize the fulfillment of this paper.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Basically, the challenging question that drove the teacher's action is very simple. The final answer, it turns out, takes years to be formulated and settled down:

What methodology can be used to teach reading creatively so as to arouse and maintain the students' interests and motivation in the reading itself?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Models of the Reading Process

There are some concepts that became the foundation for teaching reading. Neil J. Anderson's *Exploring Second Language Reading—Issues and Strategies* (1999) discusses three models of the reading process. The first model discussed is bottom-up, which emphasizes what is typically known as "lower-level" reading processes consisting of word recognition (Anderson, 1999:2). In contrast to bottom-up model, top-down model views a reader as being actively engaged in the text, and emphasizes "higher -level" processes which is concerned primarily with integration of textual information and includes resolving ambiguities in the text (ibid:3). Interactive model, the third model which combines elements of both bottom-up and top-down models, emphasizes two conceptions of interactive approaches:

The first relates to the interaction that occurs between the reader and the text. This suggests that meaning does not simply reside in the text itself but that as readers interact with the text their own background knowledge facilitates the task of comprehending. The second conception of interactive approaches relates to the interaction between bottom-up and top-down processes. Fluent reading involves both decoding and interpretation skills. With the research to date on reading processes in both first and second language reading we know that reading integrates several skills, strategies, and processes and is not a simple event to describe. (Grabe, 1991:378 in Anderson, 1999:3)

Furthermore, Anderson states that:

As I have observed my students in the reading class and reflected on these three models which try to explain the reading process, I can see that an interactive model is the best description of what happens when we read. Second language readers do

some bottom-up things when they read (decode unfamiliar vocabulary, struggle with poor print quality of a handout I have given them, wonder about a part of speech of a particular word), and they do some top-down things when they read (anticipate what is coming next in the text, draw on their previous experience). I believe my teaching of reading has improved as I have come to understand that reading is an interactive process of both bottom-up and top-down models. (Anderson, 1999:3-4)

Another view about the reading process is that of Lewis and Hill (1992:109-110). They mention briefly the differences between intensive and extensive reading: Intensive reading means students are expected to understand everything they read and to be able to answer detailed vocabulary and comprehension questions, while extensive reading is when the students are expected to have a general understanding of the text without necessarily understanding every word. They state further that intensive reading helps to improve extensive reading, but the latter also needs to be practised in its own right, principally to give students confidence in dealing with authentic materials.

With this understanding, and encouraged by Anderson's observation note quoted above, the teachers apply the above interactive model in the Integrated Reading Class: allowing both bottom-up and top-down things in class when the students read, as well as covering some problematic but comprehension-enhancing grammar such as discussion on complex sentences. The teachers also particularly adopt Lewis and Hill's view on the extensive reading by applying reading assignment for the students in which they are assigned to read a chapter or less of a selected authentic reading material outside the class, and allocate a meeting in class a week later to discuss this assignment.

Reading Techniques

At least there are three reading techniques that Anderson (2008; 2009) exposes in his books, i.e. KWL, SQ3R, and DRTA.

KWL (Anderson, 2009:93-96; Tierney and Readence: 2005: 257-262) standing for Know, Want, and Learn is a three-step-reading technique the start of which is activating the students' background knowledge by asking what they already KNOW (K) about the text after skimming quickly through the text they will read: reading the title, the headings, and the first paragraph. According to Tierney and Readence (2005: 258) step K involves brainstorming and generating categories of ideas. The next step is then, asking the students, "What do you

WANT (W) to learn as you read?” By doing these steps before reading, students can read with a purpose. After the students read the text, ask the students “What did you LEARN (L) while reading? Did you learn what you wanted to? If not, what did you learn, instead?” Tierney and Readence quoted Ogle who claims that the strategy has helped students become better readers of expository text at the same time as it has helped teachers develop a more interactive teaching style.

SQ3R (Anderson, 2009:139-142) helps to read fluently and increase comprehension. This starts with Survey (S), in which students are given a chance to overview the text or chapter they are going to read for about 1-2 minutes by noticing the headings, bold printing, italics, pictures, charts, graphs, end-of-chapter questions, etc. Then, Students are encouraged to ask Questions (Q) concerning what they have surveyed, and begin to Read (R1). After reading, they can Recite (R2) what they have read by writing, answer questions, or sharing orally. These Read-Recite steps can be done several times for several parts of the text, depending on the length of the text. The last step, Review (R3), is to gain the content of the text as a whole.

DRTA (Anderson, 2009: 47-50) is a method that will help students to read critically and purposefully. Each stage of the DRTA procedure has four steps: Predicting, Reading, Proving, and Reasoning. Predicting is made after the students read the title, headings, illustrations, and other striking printing, and is based on the teacher’s question such as, “What do you think the text will be about?” Afterwards, they are given time to read some parts of the text, and then prove whether or not their prediction is correct. Based on their reading, they are encouraged to make further prediction about what the next part of the text will be about. At the end, the students should summarize the main points of the text they read.

Together with Scanning and Skimming, these three reading techniques are trained in class, because based on our small-scaled research on high school English textbooks then, these skills were not specifically covered. Moreover, our Pre self-assessment result also detects that freshmen have never heard of, let alone use, the reading techniques. Therefore, these techniques are to be taught in this Integrated Reading Class.

Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences

The students' learning Styles and multiple intelligences should be taken into consideration in teaching reading. Choosing methodology in teaching reading needs to be based on these concepts rather than based on the teacher's preference, even though the teacher's learning style and multiple intelligences also play a certain role. Matching or mismatching students' learning styles with instructional techniques affects learning significantly (Bedfort, 2004 in Putintseva, 2006).

To start with, the VAK (Visual-Auditory-Kinesthetic) concept first developed in the 1920s (Businessballs.com 2010) can be shared here because this is the simplest. This concept recognizes the fact that each person learns differently. The visual learning style involves the use of seen or observed things including pictures, diagrams, demonstrations, displays, handouts, films, or flip-chart. Auditory Learning style involves the transfer of information through listening to the spoken words, of self or others, and of sounds and noises. Kinesthetic learning, lastly, involves physical experience like using muscular movement, touching, feeling, holding, doing, and practical hands-on experience.

Putintseva (2006) summarizes the various perspectives of learning styles in light of information processing (the different ways learners sense, think, solve problems, and remember information), personality patterns (how learners react and feel about different situations), and social interaction (attitudes, habits, and strategies learners will take toward their work and how they engage with their peers when they learn) as follows.

Within information processing category, it is interesting to observe Learning Styles inventory (Kolb, 1984) which includes learners with these styles:

- a. Diverging (feeling and watching): able to look at things from different perspectives, prefer to watch rather than do, perform better in situations that require ideas generation such as brainstorming, tend to be strong in the arts, prefer to work in groups and receive personal feedback
- b. Assimilating (watching and thinking): prefer a concise, logical approach; more interested in ideas and concepts than in people; excel at wide ranging information and organizing it in a clear logical format; prefer readings, lectures and having time to think
- c. Converging (doing and thinking): use learning to find solutions to practical issues, like to simulate, and work with practical applications
- d. Accommodating (doing and feeling): attracted to new challenges and experiences, like carrying out plans and setting targets, prefer to work in teams to complete tasks

Within personality patterns, Putintseva (2006) quotes the famous Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), David Keirsey (1998), and McCarthy (1990). However, it is adequate to quote Keirsey's styles here which include:

- a. Artisan: born for artful action such as fine art and dramatic arts, making free, spontaneous maneuvers that get quick and effective results
- b. Guardians: sensible and down-to-earth people, undertake tasks and actions cautiously, believe in following rules and regulations
- c. Idealists: have an instinct for interpersonal integration, sometimes become leader, often speak interpretively and metaphorically of the abstract world of their imagination
- d. Rationals: competent and pragmatic, tend to be organizing and planning, or inventing and configuring operations

Within social interaction, Reichmann and Grasha (1974) is quoted to focus on student attitudes toward learning, classroom activities, teachers, and peers. This model identifies the following characteristics:

- a. Avoidant students: tend to have high absenteeism, organize their work poorly, take little responsibility for their learning
- b. Participative students: willing to accept responsibility for self-learning and relate well to peers
- c. Competitive students: suspicious of their peers leading to competition for rewards and recognition
- d. Collaborative students: enjoy working in harmony with their peers
- e. Dependent students: Typically become frustrated when facing new challenges not directly addressed in the classroom
- f. Independent students: prefer to work alone, require little direction from the teacher.

Howard Gardner's monumental model of Multiple Intelligences (1983) is illustrated in this simple grid diagram by Business.com (2010) :

Intelligence Type	Capability and Perception
-------------------	---------------------------

Linguistic	Words and language
Logical-mathematical	Logic and numbers
Musical	Music, sound, rhythm
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Body movement control
Spatial-visual	Images and space
Interpersonal	Other people's feeling
Intrapersonal	Self awareness
Naturalist	Natural environment
Spiritual/Existential	Religion and 'ultimate issues'
Moral	Ethics, humanity, value of life

In order to make use of the students' intelligences, optimize learning and training, design accelerated learning method, and assess learning suitability and effectiveness, appropriate methodology may be applied, as shown among others:

Intelligence Type	Related Tasks, Activities, & Tests
Musical	Sing a song, perform a musical piece, review a musical work
Spatial-Visual	Draw or paint something
Interpersonal	Demonstrate feelings, interpret others' moods, coach or counsel another person
Intrapersonal	Do self-reflection, decide own aims & personal changes
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Playing drama, assemble things

Practical Techniques for Teaching Reading

In search of ideas on practical techniques for teaching reading, several outstanding ideas are noted as follows:

- a. Use pre-activities to focus students' attention and prepare them to read (Lewis and Hill, 1992:107-108). To introduce the topic or content of a text, teachers can activate the students background knowledge about something mentioned in the text; or ask limited numbers of comprehension questions that the students answer before they read the text. Another activity is to invite the students to brainstorm vocabulary that they will find in the text.
- b. Vary the method of reading (ibid:110) so as to minimize the possibility of the text killing the lesson. There are many ways of reading a text than asking the students to start reading. The simplest method is silent reading, which is appropriate for extensive reading, that is when the students are expected to have a general understanding of the text without necessarily understanding every word (ibid:109). Another method includes letting the students read in groups, where each group prepares a paragraph to read aloud to other groups and in turn build the understanding of the whole text.
- c. Process Drama is used in various ways with reading material as a stimulus for reading certain materials in a role, as a follow-up to a drama, or as a basis for the drama (Tierney & Readence, 2005:360). It is stated that Process Drama is used as a teaching instrument in the classroom (Johnson & O'Neill, 1984 as quoted in Tierney & Readence, 2005:360).
- d. Sketch to Stretch (Tierney & Readence, 2005:376-379) is intended to help readers use sketches as a means of exploring, expressing, and sharing interpretations of selections. This involves having students generate a sketch depicting their interpretations of a text or events in a text and then sharing it with a small group of classmates.
- e. Readers Theatre (Tierney & Readence, 2005:380-384) is a procedure for integrating the language arts and advancing a student's motivation to read. It focuses on improving students' oral reading and interpretation, as well as their composition and comprehension abilities.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodology is greatly employed by the teachers to plan and evaluate the methodology applied in the reading class. At the beginning of a semester, the teachers meet to brainstorm ideas of what reading materials are to use, and what teaching methodology can be applied. The result of student and teacher evaluation from the previous semester is used for reinforcement and/or improvement. The output of this stage is the comprehensive syllabus in the format set by the Institution Quality Assurance of Duta

Wacana Christian University. During the teaching semester, teachers will record their teaching procedure after every session in a Teacher's Journal.

At the end of the semester, as the institution requires, students will fill out an evaluation form that will be processed by using the internal information system, and the result of which will be distributed to several concerned parties including the teachers after the teachers report the final grades. To cater more specific research questions such as stated above among others, teachers ask the students to express their opinions (in different ways: written, orally, or by using sticky notes, colored cards, drawings, songs, whistles, standing in different areas of the classroom, etc.) about the use of a certain teaching method directly after the teaching method is used in the classroom and/or distribute an additional evaluation form to the students, the result of which will be processed separately from the university evaluation form. The sum of the responses or feedback will become a valuable learning experience for the teachers in assessing and improving the reading class.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Based on the experience gained year after year since this reading class was first introduced in the department curriculum in the year of 2000, several lessons learned, as well as some confirming and rewarding findings, can be reported here as follows:

1. Empowering the students with applied reading techniques in a reading class is very helpful to make them more effective and successful readers. As stated earlier, the Pre self-assessment result detects that the students have never heard of most of the reading techniques that are going to be taught in this Integrated Reading Class. At the end of the semester, however, they are able to specify each reading technique covered in class as well as apply them quite successfully for their reading purposes, characterized by the achievement of the passing grade by more than 80% of the participants in average.

2. The use of interactive model (Anderson, 1999) and combination between intensive and extensive reading (Lewis & Hill, 1992) are appropriate. This policy has enabled the students to increase their reading capability.
3. Various and varied pre and post reading activities should be prepared carefully since this will arouse and retain student motivation to read and their positive attitude toward reading. To mention some, the pre and post reading activities that are already applied in class are: watching a movie clip, listening to a song or filling in the cloze form of and discussing the lyrics, drawing a comic, playing a skit/drama, mimicking (e.g. mimicking a paraplegic drawing by mouth),
4. Challenged by Lewis & Hill's idea that there are many ways to make the students read a text, the teachers have used the following techniques successfully:
 - a. Jigsaw learning: divide the text into 3 or 4 parts, assign each part to a different group of students to master. Then, each student in the master groups have to make a composing group in which each shares the part of the text that they master. As a group, this smaller group has to compose the whole text .
 - b. Practicing Reasoning—the last step in DRTA—in which the teacher cuts out the end of the story (or any other part) from the reading text for the students to predict. Individually, they have to write the end of the story, and share it to a partner. Each pair has to choose only one version of the ending, and collect it to the teacher who will post them on the classroom walls for everybody to read. The teacher then hands out the original end of the text for the students to read. The class picks the closest prediction version as the winner.
 - c. Scanning & Skimming Competition: while the students are reading, the teacher writes on the board several details from the text, such as names and years. Students have to compete in reciting the details in their own words. Another variation is, instead of writing the details on the board, each detail is given to a pair of students who then has to recite the detail and asks the class to guess what the detail is.
5. Giving a chance to the students to relate the text to their own life adds the value of the text, as well as increase students' comprehension and engagement to the reading process. Some stimuli for this purpose are:

- a. What would you do if you were...? Why?
 - b. Would you give such response to....? Why (not)?
 - c. How different are you from the character ? Or how similar are you?
 - d. This character reminds me of....
 - e. This story/ experience/event reminds me of....
 - f. What I like/hate most from the text is....
6. Letting the students choose their own way of presenting the summary of the story can be enjoyable to the students, build their positive attitude toward reading, and make the teachers ecstatic. In line with the theory of Multiple Intelligences, this is also a chance to reward the students with the opportunity to cultivate certain intelligences of their own. The various ways that we have seen so far other than artistic powerpoint presentations are playing live drama or filmed drama, singing a self-composed song, finger puppet/ hand puppet/puppet show, and narrated pantomime. Usually this is performed as a final reading project, in which students are assigned a reading text in a group of 3 to be presented in half-semester time.
 7. The use of alternative assessment like writing a self-assessment essay, journal portfolio, and reading project presentation proves to be a positive factor to retain student motivation to read during the semester.
 8. Include fun in the reading class by using well-chosen techniques of dividing class into groups or pairs, e.g. by humming songs, by using pieces of a puzzle, by using cards, by mimicking. For ideas, explore the concepts of Multiple Intelligences and learning styles. Then, experiment.

IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The result and findings described above have led to the following implication and recommendation:

1. Students do not hate reading. It is the methodology of teaching reading that they hate or make them hate reading. Likewise, teachers do not despise teaching reading. They merely sense their incompetence in doing so. Therefore, teachers should be well-equipped with methodology for teaching reading and the supporting concepts.

Teacher training or class observation can be a means for this purpose. Other practical things to do are documenting the Teacher's Journal and filming reading class activities for self-access teacher resource materials.

2. Integrated teaching (teaching the four language skills) can be fulfilled in a reading class by implementing pre and post reading activities that cover three other skills, i.e. listening, speaking, and writing.

CLOSING

“Today a reader, tomorrow a leader” says Margaret Fuller. Reading helps shape young minds and prepare them for the future. Therefore, teaching reading is very rewarding, besides challenging. Engaging creatively with literature in a reading class is made possible by making use of various methodology in line with the well-defined model of reading process, reading techniques, and the concepts of Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles that are appropriately applied to cater the profile of the learners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Neil J. 1999. *Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and Strategies*. Toronto: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Anderson, Neil J. 2008. *Active Skills for Reading Book 4*. (2nd Ed). Massachusetts: Heinle Cengage Learning.

Anderson, Neil J. 2009. *Active Skills for Reading Book 3*. (2nd Ed). Massachusetts: Heinle Cengage Learning.

Lewis, Michael & Hill, Jimmie. 1992. *Practical Techniques for Language Teaching*. London: Language Teaching Publications.

Tierney, Robert J. & Readence, John E. 2005. *Reading Strategies and Practices: A Compendium*. Boston: Pearson Education.

- 2010. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. Downloaded from howardgardnermultipleintelligences.htm on July 22, 2010.

Putintseva, Tatyana. 2011. The Importance of Learning Styles in ESL/EFL. Downloaded from Oregon\Putintseva-LearningStyles.html on March 8, 2011.

