

INTERACTIVE POST-READING ACTIVITIES THAT WORK

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Abstract: The post-reading stage of a reading lesson is often confused with the closing of a lesson. However, having new information from the whilst-reading stage should bring about a change such as the students would know more, or think or feel differently from before. Teachers should help students connect the new information they are now familiar with and their lives. This article re-introduces the importance of the post-reading stage and some workable, meaningful activities. Interactive activities are chosen so that students not only process their knowledge obtained from the text but also communicate this new knowledge to peers.

Key words: post-reading activities, reading comprehension

Abstrak: Fase pasca-baca (*post-reading*) pada pelajaran membaca sering dikaburkan dengan kegiatan akhir pelajaran. Seharusnya, informasi baru yang diperoleh pada fase sedang-baca (*whilst-reading*) dapat menghasilkan perubahan, misalnya, siswa memiliki pengetahuan lebih, atau berfikir dan merasa beda dari sebelumnya. Guru harus menolong para siswa untuk menghubungkan informasi baru yang mereka peroleh dengan kehidupan mereka. Tulisan ini mengenalkan kembali pentingnya fase pasca-baca dan kegiatan-kegiatan yang bermakna dan dapat dilakukan. Kegiatan-kegiatan interaktif dipilih agar siswa tidak hanya memproses informasi yang diperoleh dari teks bacaan tapi juga mengkomunikasikan pengetahuan baru ini kepada rekan-rekannya.

Kata-kata kunci: pembelajaran membaca, aktivitas pascabaca, membaca pemahaman

Reading deals with understanding written texts. Although it is actually a complex activity involving both perception and thought, it is an everyday activity done by many people. People read bills, billboards, names and addresses, names of streets, newspapers, advertisements, brands, menus, prices and fares, notices, manuals, medicine directions, forms, invitations, TV programs and announcements, train and plane schedules, song lyrics, film subtitles, on-line articles, and books. These reading activities can be carried out in our national language,

Indonesian, and/or in the most widely-used, global language, English.

I believe Indonesian teachers of English know for sure the need for students to be able to read in this foreign language so that they can carry on with reading English texts when they have left school. These students might not need to speak or write in the language, but reading English texts seems to be, to a certain extent, unavoidable.

Getting students to read English texts, therefore, is an important part of the English teacher's job because of many reasons. First, many students want and need to be

able to read English texts for present study, for further study, for future career or simply for pleasure. Second, the more students read, the better readers they become (Harmer, 2007: 101). Furthermore, better readers usually gain more vocabulary from their reading activities and are more familiar with the grammar of the language they are reading, which is useful for language acquisition. Third, reading texts provide good models for English writing, concerning construction of phrases, sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. Finally, good reading texts can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, inspire creative responses, and provide trigger or springboard for interesting language lessons involving various language skills.

The above reasons suggest that beside the reading activity, the reading text itself is an important “object” for students to get information from, to learn or simply to enjoy, which further suggests that both the teacher and the students should make the most of the reading texts they are dealing with. The “object” we are referring to contains lots of language samples to be introduced to the students so as to make the students familiar with the samples of the target language. These language samples should stay in the students’ memories ready to be retrieved at the right moments. Reading a text, therefore, should be done repeatedly. Of course, there would be a risk that students will get bored of reading the same texts again and again. Therefore, there must be strategies to do it so that the students would do the repetition willingly. One way to do this is by conducting a reading lesson in several stages, each with a different purpose and manner, so that the learners will be acquainted with and will be recycling text structures, sentence structures, vocabularies, and idiomatic expressions contained in the text.

THE THREE STAGES OF A READING LESSON

A reading lesson, in which we intend to grasp meaning of new information based on what we already know, think or feel about the topic we are about to read, is divided into three stages based on the purposes of each stage, i.e. the pre-, whilst-, and post reading.

The Pre-/Before Reading Stage

A reading lesson should begin with a pre-reading activity to introduce the topic and to make sure students have enough vocabulary, grammar, and background information to understand the text. The teacher should be careful not to introduce all new words or unfamiliar grammar no matter how good his/her intention is. Instead of explaining all of the potentially problematic new material ahead of time, for example, the teacher can assign the students to discuss in pairs or small groups some key words extracted from the text by the teacher and to try to figure it out together with the help of a dictionary.

In the pre/before reading stage, the teacher normally works on general aspects of the topic to elicit what students already know about the topic and make them ready for the new information. Guidance before reading may involve providing a reason for reading, introduction of the text, breaking up the text, dealing with unfamiliar language, and asking leading questions (Nuttall, 1996: 152). In real life we read because we want to read, and there is a reason for us to read; therefore, the teacher should set up reasons for the students so that reading a text becomes meaningful. Introduction of a text is useful in that with a little background knowledge, the students will be able to read the text comfortably. The teacher must be careful not to give a long introduction, which is by definition not an introduction, and not to give irrelevant points in the in-

roduction. Breaking up a text is needed only when the text is too long. Dealing with unfamiliar language involves discussing unfamiliar grammar and vocabulary. However, again not all unfamiliar words or phrases should be pre-taught because there are contexts to help the readers guess meaning of unfamiliar words and there are words which are not significantly needed for comprehension. Leading questions provide the students with the right direction to comprehend the text, so these questions should not ask for detailed answers.

It would be easier for students to comprehend a text when they already have a sense of what they are going to read. Also, the students will be less dependent on the words on the page and they will be able to get global meaning in a shorter time. The teacher should be careful in this stage not to be tempted to give away everything for the students to be able to read smoothly, in a linear way, with no effort whatsoever. This kind of help is counterproductive because the students would not have good practice in making sense of a text. What is more, they will be over-reliant on the teacher and will probably never become independent readers.

Common activities in this stage are: predicting from words/phrases, title/first sentences/key illustrations, readers' questions, general telling, sharing existing knowledge.

The During/Whilst Reading Stage

In during/whilst reading stage, we generally read a text with some purpose or interest in mind. One important purpose is for the teacher to model good reading strategies such as identifying main ideas, predicting information what comes next, relating one idea with another, guessing meaning of unfamiliar words in context or deciding to skip unfamiliar words. Therefore, the stage is normally dominated with discussions and

activities that match with students' interest so as to help the teacher gear the activities toward achieving the purpose. The teacher should remember not to dominate the activities because the final goal of any reading program is "to enable students to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts, at appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding" (Nuttall, 1996: 31). Apparently, students also need some time to experience and get used to individual silent reading.

Common activities in this stage are: modeled reading, skimming-scanning, re-reading, pause-'n-predicting, asking and answering questions, summarizing, jigsaw reading-writing, reading aloud by the teacher (or from a tape).

The Post-/After Reading Stage

When the during-/whilst- reading stage is completed, the students are expected to have obtained new information from the text. This should bring about a change of some kind such as they would know more, or think or feel differently from before. Therefore, we ask, "So what?", which leads to the connection between the new information the students are now familiar with and their lives. According to Nuttall (1996: 164) when intensive work in a during-/whilst reading stage is completed, general comprehension must be intended to. At this stage, the students should be able to evaluate the text as a whole to respond to it from a more or less personal point of view. They may be asked to agree or disagree with the author or the characters in the text; relate the content to their own experience; connect the content with other work in the same field; discuss characters, incidents, ideas, feelings; or predict what can happen afterwards.

Common post reading activities are: creating stories or end of stories, producing

posters, reconstructing texts, and questioning the text or views of the writer.

IMPORTANCE OF POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Post-reading activities are simply activities done after during-reading activities are completed. At this stage the students are in a temporary change of state or condition, that is, they now know something they did not know before. They know some new vocabulary items, some new sentence structures, some new idiomatic expressions, and they have new knowledge about a certain topic. However, it is definitely not the right time for the class to just “call it a day”. How many times do we see lesson plans with good pre-reading activities and well-planned during reading activities, but brief, “classic” post-reading activities such as “write the answers on a piece of paper”, “translate paragraph 2”, “write a sentence for each of the new words found in the text”, “using a similar pattern, write about your house”?

Something must be done to help the students use what they now know so that these new things will become more than just knowledge. In a post-reading stage students are not studying about the language of the text and they are not comprehending the text, either. At the post-reading stage students are supposed to apply what they possess.

Post-reading activities are expected to encourage students to reflect upon what they have read. The purposes of the activities are for the students to use the familiar text as basis for specific language study, to allow the students to respond to the text creatively and to get the students to focus more deeply on the information in the text. For the new information to stay with them, the students need to go beyond simply **reading** the information to **using** it. Following up in the post-reading stage is critical to

both comprehension, which is instruction sensitive, and obtaining and working on new information, which takes the students to their real life situation. Well-designed after-reading activities usually require the learners to return to the text several times and to reread it to check on particular information of language use. Students, individually or in groups, should have ample time to share and discuss the work they have completed. This enables the students to tie up loose ends, answer any remaining questions, and to understand the interrelationships of topics covered. When readers are called on to communicate the ideas they have read, it is then that they learn to conceptualize and discover what meaning the text has to them. Although teachers should be careful to spend just some time in the pre-reading stage, they are actually expected to spend more time in the post-reading stage with several activities. A two-fold purpose is involved here, namely: students need to (1) recycle what they have obtained from the text and (2) go beyond the text and enter the real world, equipped with the newly-obtained information.

WHAT STUDENTS GAIN FROM POST-READING ACTIVITIES

At least six principles in foreign language teaching-learning by Brown (2007: 62-81) can be fulfilled. From recycling some language components in different ways through different language skills, automaticity is certainly on its way. Meaningful learning is carried out because at a post-reading stage students relate new information with their own life and experiences. Each student is asked to respond to parts of the text she or he has read. Because students are active in responding to the texts they have been, and the teacher puts himself in the background, students are empowered and to a certain extent, in control of the activities. This may lead to students auto-

my. Willingness to communicate, which involve students' willingness to take risks and being self-confident, is gained because they are supposed to be well-prepared to do the post-activities. When students are given different tasks, they have good opportunities to use the language, orally as well as written. This puts them in a position where they can develop their interlanguage. Finally, post-reading activities are not interested in the right versus wrong answers to comprehension questions anymore. Students do not have to prove they understand the vocabulary and grammar of the text, anymore. Therefore, students are not only taught to achieve linguistic competence but also discourse and strategic competence, so communicative competence is also taken care of. We can conclude that from post-reading activities, the students are developing themselves to achieve automaticity, meaningful learning, autonomy, willingness to communicate, interlanguage, and communicative competence.

INTERACTIVE POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Reading comprehension should not be alienated from the other skills (Harmer, 2007: 267). In reality, for example, we tend to talk about what we have read, especially when the content is actual, interesting, unexpected, or simply strange and unbelievable.

Therefore, we may link reading and writing, for example, by summarizing, note-making, mentioning what has been read in a letter. We might link reading and listening by comparing what we have heard to reading a news report, comparing the song we heard from the radio to the song lyric downloaded from the internet. Still, we might link reading and speaking by discussing what we have learned from a reading passage and retelling stories.

There are many activities that will refine, enrich, and increase interest in the assigned topic of a text. However, the primary goal of the post reading phase is to further develop and clarify interpretations of the text, and to help students remember what they have individually created in their minds from the text. Good post-reading activities should be able to get the students to recycle some aspects from their whilst-reading activities; to go beyond the text; to share opinions, ideas, feelings; and to give reasons to communicate.

There are various kinds of interactive post-reading activities that relate reading to other language skills. The following activities are mostly taken from Bamford and Day (2004) and, after some adaptation, are proven to have worked well in my classes.

Interactive Post-reading Activities Focusing on Listening

1. Identifying differences

The students listen to the teacher reading a text with some changes. Initially, this is an individual activity. Then, in pairs students discuss their findings. This activity is ended after class reports from groups of four, each reporting one change. As a variation, the reporting can be done competitively by assigning two groups to write the changes on the board with a time limit.

2. Add-on Information:

The entire class adds to existing information in this exercise. Student 1 recalls a piece of information. Student 2 repeats that information and adds another piece of information. Student 3 repeats what was given by 1 and 2 and adds a third piece of information. This continues until all the students have had an opportunity to contribute. Note: The add-on information does not have to follow the sequence in the text.

Interactive Post-reading Activities Focusing on Speaking

Students are likely to understand more when they discuss with each other what they have learned, so they must have special opportunities to orally discuss their opinions, feelings, and conclusions, from their reading activity. Some of the ways to do this include the following activities.

1. TV reporters

Students can pretend to be television reporters with two minutes to sum up the highlights of the "story." They work in small groups to decide on the highlights which are written as news prompt on a laptop or a large piece of paper put on a stand.

2. Main ideas list

Students list the five (or more) main ideas of the text beginning with the most important to the least (not following the order in the text). This can be done in a Round Robin type of activity, in which each student is a group of 4-5 students takes turn saying one main idea.

3. Teacher-absent student

A student becomes the "teacher" and explains what was covered in class with a "student who was absent." This is a good and meaningful activity because the students are trained to decide important aspects of a lesson. The activity may become really entertaining when "the teacher" plays a role of a real teacher the class know.

4. Debate

The students can take specific sides of a topic and debate an issue. Depending on the levels of students, the activity can range from the students just mentioning likes and dislike to a real debate activity.

5. Hot Seat

One student becomes the "writer" of a text or a character in a text, answering the class's questions. The questions can be creative, whose answers are not found

in the text. Here, there is aspect of unpredictability, which is one important characteristics of real communication. Funny answers are expected, and these are the interesting part of the activity.

6. Vanishing cloze

This activity helps the students memorize a poem by doing a cloze procedure orally. The teacher adds the blanks until no more words are left. Although it is a teacher-centered activity, the teacher can assign the students to work in groups of four and at different point of the process the teacher and call out students in different group to recite a certain part of the poem. To give equal chance to the students, this activity can be done in a Numbered Heads Together format.

7. Team Review

Students review material already studied and share their knowledge with other students. This can be done in groups, where students move to other groups to "socialize" their knowledge.

Interactive Post-Reading Activities Focusing on Writing

1. Story Innovation

Students are assigned to create a story based on any part of the text. For example, after reading "the Boy Who Cried Wolf", the students had to write a story based on the part when the villagers were tricked for the first time. One created story was: **The villagers were angry. Mrs. Doubtfire scolded the boy, "You naughty boy... you made me spill my delicious vegetable soup. Shame on you!" She went back home and had to make the soup all over again.** (Class work, 2009)

2. Innovation on the ending

Students change the ending of a story. For example, after reading "The Boy Who Cried Wolf", whose ending was a wolf really came and ate some of the

boy's sheep, a student wrote, "The wolf ate the boy. So, the villagers lived peacefully and happily ever after." (By: Riza, 2010)

3. Cartoon strip

Students create a comic for a "scene" in the text. This activity should be done in small groups in which there must be one student who can draw or make use of Clipart program. The group decide the content of the story and help the "artist" to create the strip. This activity should not be carried out when only a few students can draw.

4. Reader's theatre

Students create a short play based on the text. The teacher, however, should remind the students not to overdo the preparation. With young learners, lots of movements in place of words can be done. With older students, an impromptu short skit or a short play taking a five-minute preparation would suffice.

5. Wanted posters

Students create wanted posters of a character in the text. For "the Princess and the Pea", for example, the poster would be pictures of princesses and description of an ideal princess.

6. Story map

Students create story maps that can be used by others to re-tell the story. To make this activity more interactive and meaningful, a "One Stay-Three Stray" Cooperative Learning activity can be implemented so that learners learn from other groups can give and take information as well as inspiration from other groups.

7. Clipping

In groups, students produce a poster containing several pictures related to the topic of the text. These pictures could be contained in the text or produced by the students themselves. Then, representative of each group describes the picture to

students who play the role "guests" of an exhibition.

8. Summarizing

This activity enables students to identify writer's main ideas, recognize the purpose or intent of the selection, distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, note the evidence for support of main ideas, detect the organizational pattern of the author, follow material sequentially Note: Students can share, compare, and discuss individual summaries in groups or as a class. Many times discussions will lead to observations of different interpretations which students have not previously recognized.

9. Composing a Test

Preparing an actual test is a valuable tool in helping students decide the main purpose and the most relevant information found in a text.

This activity can be done in several ways:

- a. Have each student write 1-2 test questions. Compile these and actually create the test from students' questions.
- b. Divide students into small groups. Each group is responsible for writing a test. These tests are distributed around the class so that each group has another groups' test to answer. The answers are handed back to the group who originated the test to be corrected.
- c. Have the students compile a class test that you will use for future classes. They can complete the questions individually or in groups. The test they create can be a valuable tool in reviewing for the actual test.

10. Agony column

Students write a reply letter to a character in the text about how to solve a problem. An example:

Dear Vince,

It seems that you have a difficulty to understand your partner's hobby. You hate her music while she loves it so much, so it becomes a real problem. I think you had better take my advice to help you solve your problem. Here is what you should do: *You have to realize that every person has his or her own hobby.*etc. etc.(By Firdha Khaerani, 2006)

11. Lessons for living:

Students write what they learn from the text in the form of a letter to a close friend or to the editor of a newspaper or magazine.

An example:

A lesson that I can get from this article is that in making regulations in plural society like Indonesia we have to consider [an issue] wisely, we cannot judge something from one side. It is hard to change a custom in a society. But etc.

(By Aga Deta, 2006)

12. A character's diary

A student pretends to be a character and writes a diary based on the story. An example:

Thursday, March 21, 2006, 11 p.m.

Dear Diary,

I thought my life was over because I have a boyfriend now and I do not really like him that way, and I have to break up with him without hurting his feelings, which is I guess, probably impossible. Well, I ... etc.

(By: Ismiyati S., 2006)

Other Interactive Post-reading Activities

1. Story Reading

This activity is meant for reading with an audience such as young learners. The reader of a text (usually a short fable, folk tale, fairy tale, or procedure text) has to be well-prepared in terms of pronunciation, intonation, key or new vocabulary, when to pause and give comments,

show pictures or make use of media, or ask questions.

2. Story Telling

In this activity, the story teller has to really know the story. He or she has to prepare the story and rehearse again and again so as not to make any language mistakes when doing the actually story telling. To help the teller to communicate his or her story as well as the audience to understand the story, some media such as puppets, cut-outs, realia, or animation on LCD, can be used.

3. Interactive Dictation

Unlike the usual practice, in which the teacher dictates a short summary of the text for pronunciation and spelling purposes, students carry out the dictation activity (also called Running/Walking Dictation) in groups. Here, the teacher prepares the short version of a "known" text and gives it to the student in charge of the dictation. Another variation is each member of the group dictates one sentence at a time for the others to write. The final part of the activity, which seems to be the most "serious", is the students correct their work based on the written text given by the teacher. At this stage, everybody is absorbed in checking his/her individual work and copying the correct words.

4. Interactive cross-word puzzle

The purpose of this activity is to recycle vocabulary items learned from some reading texts. The students work in pair in an information gap activity, in which each member has a different set partially completed cross-word puzzle without clues. The pair take turns asking each other so that they can have the completed cross-word puzzle. Because no clues are provided, the student who has the answers should construct the clues to be guessed by the other student in the pair.

CONCLUSION

The importance of post-reading activities cannot be denied. At least three reading principles mentioned by Harmer (2007: 101-2) can be found in post-reading activities, namely: students need to be engaged with what they are reading, students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a text, and good teachers exploit reading texts to the full. Therefore, teachers should plan their post-reading activities according to teaching-learning objectives, profile of the students, as well as students' and classroom conditions. The keyword for using post-reading activities is variety, which leads to creating positive, creative, innovative, effective and fun activities. Through a variety of post-reading activities, students are expected to recycle certain learning aspects of language skills and components so that their communicative competence can be developed well.

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