

Two Approaches to Teaching Reading: A Classroom-Based Study

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The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of teaching EFL reading on the progress of students in academic reading classes of a university preparation course. Two approaches were investigated: a "traditional" and a "text-strategic" approach. The same text book was used as the basis for both treatments, and a matched groups pretest/posttest design was used. The study looked at pretest/posttest gain scores for the sample as a whole and for each group, and compared the performances of the groups.

Although the sample was small, and - as expected in a classroom-based study - the full range of variables could not be controlled for, the results of the study indicate that a "text-strategic" approach to the teaching of reading in a foreign language may be superior to the more "traditional" approach. It is suggested that classroom-based studies such as this, though their findings must be tentative, have a useful role

RATIONALE

Full-time classroom teachers generally find their time fully utilized in confronting the everyday challenges of their work. At the same time, however, the conscientious professional keeps in touch with the methodological literature and with new developments in materials. In my own case, in recent years, I have become aware that this has resulted in gradual changes in attitude and approach to teaching reading to advanced students in a university preparation course, without my having at any point stopped to examine my position, either previously or currently held. There have, in fact, been great changes in approaches to the teaching of reading in a non-native language in the recent past. The emphasis has shifted from what is referred to in this article, for want of a more precise definition, as the "traditional" approach (eg Finocchiaro 1958; Lado 1964; Rivers 1968; Allen and Valette 1972) which concentrated on the comprehension of individual passages through the use of exercises which looked at 'bits' or discrete points of which the text was built, in the belief that written text is the sum of its individual parts. In contrast, the recent trend is to exploit the generalizable features of text as these have been made clearer for use through research in psycholinguistics, first language reading developments and discourse analysis (eg Goodman 1967; Halliday and Hasan 1976; van Dijk 1977; Kintsch and van Dijk 1978; Just and Carpenter 1980; de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981), in order to help learners develop skills for approaching *any* text. I shall refer here to this as the "text-strategic" approach, a term of my own devising for convenience in referring to these contrasting approaches.

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