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Foreword

This is the first time that ESTEEM Academic Journal UiTM Pulau Pinang has come up with 2 publications in a year! Previously, ESTEEM was published once biennially.

For these publications to materialise, I would like to thank Associate Professor Mohd Zaki Abdullah, the Director of UiTM Pulau Pinang for his unflinching support and who always told me, “Go ahead, don’t worry about the money!”.

Both the Associate Professor Mohd Zaki Abdullah and Dr. Mohamad Abdullah Hemdi, the Deputy Director of Academic Affairs really provided me with a great deal of assistance in ensuring that there are sufficient articles for publishing. Both of them have emphasized the need for lecturers to embark on journal writing. Incidentally this is one of the prerequisites for promotion among the academic staff members of UiTM Pulau Pinang.

I do not think I can run the show alone without the help from the editorial board, reviewers and the cooperation from University Publication Centre (UPENA) of UiTM Malaysia. My special thanks to Mr. Mohd Aminudin Murad for his efficiency in editing articles and to Dr. Khairil Iskandar Othman for speeding up the final stage of printing process.

Since writing is an important criterion in rating a university, I feel it is a great responsibility for me to produce a good journal. Fellow colleagues, let’s work closely to put UiTM Pulau Pinang in the final list of Anugerah Kualiti Naib Canselor (AKNC) and Anugerah Kualiti Perdana Menteri (AKPM) by submitting more quality articles to ESTEEM!

Lastly, let me end by thanking all of you for giving your unwavering support to UPENA.

The Chief Editor
November, 2008

Designing Learning Resources as Classroom Activities with the Use of Newspapers

Cheang Eng Kwong

ABSTRACT

Newspapers can be a source which brings interest, excitement and relevance to our teaching. Furthermore they deal with topics which are current and of public interest. This paper highlights why the newspapers are used in the classroom and how they are properly prepared for use. It also highlights how the writer uses the newspaper articles from time to time to design versatile learning resources as teaching materials in the classroom. In addition, some suggested ways are emphasized on how the newspapers can be adopted as a learning resource. The writer hopes to convince teachers or lecturers to use newspapers to sustain students' interest in the classroom.

Keywords: *newspapers, learning resources, classroom activities, students*

Introduction

The response from school teachers and lecturers at institutions of higher learning in the use of newspapers in classrooms has been very encouraging. It cannot be denied that newspapers are very useful and effective to motivate students to learn English. Such a program can even help to design the most versatile learning resources in the classroom (Majid Munir & Pillar, 1985). In Malaysia, the types of newspapers such as *The New Straits Times* and *The Star* are widely employed as Newspaper in English (NIE) initiatives in Malaysian schools, colleges and universities.

Many schools and institutions of higher learning have already embarked on such a program. The appropriateness of the newspaper as a resource depends upon the situation we face. Before we start to utilise newspapers in classrooms it is essential to find out the needs and interest of our students. If we use it correctly, the newspaper may spark a good deal more interest among students in the learning of the English Language.

The Reasons for Using Newspapers

There are several reasons why newspapers are used in the classroom. Newspapers are a cost effective way to educate as they are cheap and carry various articles and news on a wide range of topics. Moreover, the news is current and therefore should be of interest to readers. In addition, they are easy to use as they can be cut, marked, clipped, pasted or filed. They are also extremely flexible and adaptable to curriculum areas and grade levels and require teachers or lecturers to map out strategies to design them as they like. It is believed that newspapers can motivate students to read and sustain their interest in the classroom and this may cultivate reading as a hobby in the later part of their lives (Toben, 1987). There are newspaper features available and therefore students can therefore choose and pick the area they like. Sometimes, newspapers may link students to the real world if they read articles on “World News”, for example, news on “Astronauts Landed on the Moon”, “The Creation of a Movie World” and others. These types of articles tend to make students link themselves to an imaginative and fascinating world. Newspapers can also be used to promote literacy activities in the classroom by motivating the students to read a readily available source of literacy materials. It is up to the teachers/lecturers to come out with interesting and exciting literacy activities that can be created and incorporated into the lesson students learn in the classroom. They require a little bit of initiative and imagination to develop their lessons based on their own specific requirements. Therefore newspapers can be used as a supplementary and complementary teaching aid to try to get students interested to learn the language.

Adapting the newspaper to classroom instruction is a natural way to build many reading skills such as identifying the main idea of a paragraph, developing better critical thinking skills, understanding cause and effect, recognizing important details, determining accuracy, anticipating outcomes and improving skimming, scanning and surveying skills and many others. Hence, it is a good learning resource to be adopted for reading activities in the classroom (Nuttall, 1996).

Preparation for the Use of Newspapers

Before we use newspapers in the classroom, there are a few things, which we have to take note of:

1. Educate ourselves about the newspaper we plan to use. Make ourselves become familiar with newspaper terminology in the layout of the newspaper. It stands to reason that the more comfortable we are in our knowledge of the newspaper, the easier we can adapt to suit our curriculum.
2. We must become avid newspaper readers. As we read the newspaper on a frequent basis, we will become aware of the many ways that we can utilize the newspaper as an effective teaching tool.
3. We need to spend some class time to familiarize our students with the newspapers. They need to know the mechanics of handling the newspapers as well as the structure of the newspaper. When we feel the students have good understanding of the newspaper, we will be ready to proceed to subject-area activities.
4. Give our students a few minutes to scan their newspapers before we start our activities in class. This will enable them to read about things that interest them and their attention is less likely to drift from our planned activities.
5. Only one set of newspapers is given to a group of students in the classroom. Make sure that the group should not be more than 5 students. They can later exchange the features of articles they read with one another.

Suggested Ways to Adopt Newspapers

It is important that teachers or lecturers should be able to use newspapers in the correct way. First of all, they must not try to cover the whole set of newspapers each day. They must select just one or two features for a lesson which they think is/are suitable. Each time they use the newspaper, they have to select articles which emphasize different characteristics. This is to avoid students from getting bored in the classroom. Another important thing to bear in mind is when they pick any article from the newspaper; they have to ensure that it suits the level of students in the classroom. This is particularly essential in terms of the level of language structure and vocabulary used in some articles. It cannot be denied that

newspapers cannot replace textbooks. It must be stressed that the newspaper can be used as an alternative language activity when the class is dull. In a study conducted by Smith and Barbara (1975) on the role of newspapers in motivating students to learn a language, he reveals that the use of newspapers is something supplementary to be used in the classroom to enhance knowledge and understanding of the students. Therefore the use of newspapers is increasingly viewed crucial to be a useful learning resource.

Suggested Activities Used in the Classroom

The study adopted qualitative (interview) data collection methods. A set of semi-structured open-ended questions was prepared and used as an instrument when conducting the face-to-face interview among the students. This instrument was used as a guideline and respondents were allowed and encouraged to discuss about the given issues in detail. In-depth interviews with semi-structured questions were conducted to obtain information on students' views regarding web-based resources. All participants agreed to the use of audio taped interviews.

The following questions were used as a guideline during the interview sessions:

1. What do you understand about web-based resources?
2. How would you rate your current expertise as a computer user?
Have you used web-based resources before?
3. In your opinion, can web-based resources help you in your studies?
In what way do you think it will help you?
4. Do you prefer to have a lecturer referring to web-based resources while lecturing in class? Why? Have you come across any lecturer using it? To what extent did he/she used it?
5. In your opinion do we have enough computers to be used by our student on campus? Why?
6. For your course materials, do you prefer to it paper-based or web-based? Why? Please name the materials you prefer to have in web-based.
7. If you are given enough facilities and training, do you think you would enjoy learning using web-based resources. Can you name the facilities and training needed by you?

8. In your opinion, are the students ready to accept and able to refer to web-based resources in their studies? Why?

Activities which emanate from a newspaper must have a purpose or theme before they are used in the classroom. For example, the variety of features that the daily newspapers include can provide much insight into the society to which students can adapt and they can therefore gain knowledge of various cultures, customs, beliefs and others (Blatford, 1976).

By exploring with the help of language activities, teachers/lecturers should be aware that the texts chosen must be completely authentic. The articles and reports thus inevitably contain some challenging vocabulary but they are mostly written in a direct and accessible style (Walker, 1994)

The following are some language activities which range from comprehension and vocabulary to role-plays, matching exercises, jumbled cartoons and learning of grammar.

1. Locating Information of Importance to You

Students are asked to find information such as compound nouns, idiomatic expressions, metaphors and pairs of antonyms or synonyms in the newspaper articles. This activity is usually held in groups to test the students' understanding of words or expressions. To motivate the students to learn the language faster, points may be awarded to those who can come up with the correct answers. This will further sustain their interest in reading. This type of activity can be used to reinforce what the teacher has taught the students in the classroom and make the lesson more interesting.

2. Matching Headlines with News

Some short but interesting articles are extracted from the newspapers and headlines are removed from them. Students in the classroom are asked to match the headlines with the articles. It is important for teachers/lecturers to select those short articles, which require the students to use some language skills to do the matching. Some content-based articles can be used in the classroom to suit the need and interest of the students. It is important to note that the chosen article should suit the level of students in the classroom. The following are 4 short news stories, which should have a two-word headline – a word from Group A followed by a

word from Group B. Study the new stories and match the appropriate headline as follows:

Group A:

1. Hotel
2. Flat
3. Racial
4. Double

Group B:

1. Accord
2. Trouble
3. Raid
4. Blast

- A. A John Major look-alike, who tricked a nine-year old girl of RM2,000, was being sought by police.
- B. Black and white leaders in South Africa agreed a blueprint for power-sharing talks.
- C. At least 3 people were killed and 20 injured when an explosion believed to have been caused by gas tore through a hotel at a ski resort in the Bavarian Alps.
- D. Police are hunting the killer of John Smith, 24, whose body was found at a flat near the city centre.

3. Learning of Passive Structures

There are several points about the use of passive structures by using the headlines in the newspapers. This is very important for the students to be aware of. In a passive structure an agent (doer) may be unknown, unimportant or already mentioned therefore does not appear. Students could be asked to identify the agent of the action; first by guessing, then by reading the text or extract of the pertinent article. Students can then select examples of such structures in headlines and present them to other students asking them to identify agents for the action. Alternative answers can be provided, allowing students to discuss and justify the possible answers as in the following example:

1. Israelis condemned over bomb suicide.

Students will then be asked who condemned the Israelis and support their answers with some evidence:

- a. The Palestinians
- b. The United Nations
- c. The Organization of Islamic Conference

- d. Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi
- e. The U.S. President

If teachers supply newspaper articles to students with the headlines removed, the students will then be asked to come out with their own headlines using a passive structure. According to O'Sullivan (1999), the use of the passive structure is to create a sense of distance, formality and to make the meaning of an utterance more impersonal. This enables learners to understand the context much better.

4. Learning of Verb Tenses

Articles extracted from newspapers can be used for exercises of verb tenses. It is important for the teacher/lecturer to select the correct passage to suit the interest and need of the students. The articles selected for the students should have a short amusing account of an incident or be an anecdote that can make the student enjoy reading it. This helps students understand the passage faster and learn tenses more effectively as shown in the following example:

Possibly the world's least successful tourist is Mr. Nicholas Scotti, an Italian living in San Francisco. Some years ago, he (1) _____ (decide) to fly back to Italy to visit relatives. During the journey, the plane (2) _____ (make) a one-hour stop at Kennedy Airport. Thinking he (3) _____ (arrive) in Italy, Mr. Scotti (4) _____ (get) out of the plane and (5) _____ (spend) the whole day in New York thinking he was in Rome. The great traveller (6) _____ (notice) that modernization (7) _____ (destroy) many of Rome's ancient buildings and he later (8) _____ (tell) friends that he (9) _____ (be) surprised so many people (10) _____ (speak) English. In fact, Mr. Scotti's English is rather limited but when he (11) _____ (ask) a police officer for direction, he (12) _____ (manage) to choose an officer who (13) _____ (emigrate) from Italy several years before, and so (14) _____ (be) able to answer in fluent Italian.

By reinforcing students to do this type of exercise will help sustain their interest in learning tenses and they can comprehend better and use the tenses correctly.

5. Cartoon/Comics

Some interesting cartoons or comics that appear in the newspaper can be used to elicit students' responses to telling stories. The conversation in the cartoons or comics is deleted. Photocopies of the comics or cartoons are distributed to the students. The students are divided into small groups with a leader appointed in each group. They study the comics or cartoons closely and then invent their own stories and give their own names to the characters in the stories. The stories are then read in the classroom. Later on, the teacher /lecturer in the classroom will ask the students to paste comics or cartoons in the exercise books and write out their stories. In addition, teachers or lecturers can choose some cartoon pictures and put them in disarranged order. Students are then asked to put them back into its correct sequence based on their understanding of the cartoon pictures. This can be fun and interesting to challenge the students' interpretation of the cartoon pictures.

6. Tour Advertisement Guide

Using information from a tour advertisement to plan a holiday may be interesting. Each student has the tour advertisement taken from his/her newspaper. The teacher in the classroom asks the students some general questions about the advertisement. After this, the students are given the opportunity to explain why they prefer such a particular tour. This activity will help students elicit a lot of expressions and information. In addition, they may gain knowledge about the culture or custom about the particular country that they are keen on. A tour advertisement can also be used in a dialogue in which one student plays the role of a tourist-to-be and the other plays the role of a clerk who works in a travel agency.

7. The TV Guide

Get the students to talk about their favourite TV programs and why they like such a program. The students are then asked to tell about certain TV characters they like. They may also talk about the advantages and disadvantages of watching such a TV program. The follow-up activity may require the students to talk about their favourite TV actor/actress and the name of a program they like or dislike watching. Of course, other students in the classroom can argue with them how they differ in their views.

8. Supermarket Advertisement

Supermarket advertisements can be extracted from the newspaper to stimulate general conversation among students with emphasis laid on the usage of collective nouns. The advertisement is cut and pasted on a manila card or each student is given a copy of the advertisement in the classroom. A list of questions will be asked with the use of collective nouns as shown in the following examples:

- a. How much does a bag of sugar cost?
- b. How much does a tin of “Milo” cost?
- c. How much does a pack of “Lux” soap cost?

Then, the students give answers according to the prices of the items given in the advertisement.

9. Horoscope

Copies of horoscope with 12 signs of zodiac are given to students. Then get the students to find out their own character from the horoscope. After that, each student has to relate to us whether his/her features given in the horoscope are identical with his/her personal character. The students can either agree or disagree with the features given. If they do not agree, they need to state how they differ. Alternatively, a student can describe his or her personal character and the students will then be asked to identify the star under which he or she was born. At times, the student can combine two or three features of horoscope as his or her character if he or she does not agree with the character revealed under the particular sign. In order to make the class interesting, points will be awarded to those students who give the correct answer.

Conclusion

Newspapers certainly cannot replace textbooks. However, they can be effective and interesting supplementary or perhaps complementary teaching resources to try to get students interested to learn English if they are used correctly. Newspaper text is a practical and accessible resource for language teaching and practice. It is believed that if more teachers or lecturers can get themselves involved in using newspapers as a teaching aid, they will help map out NIE strategies more successfully. They can create interesting activities from newspaper articles or

advertisements to encourage more students to use the language freely and naturally. Besides that, newspapers can help them acquire literacy skills and useful information at the same time. Incorporating newspapers into the English second language (ESL) literacy classroom can also offer the teacher authentic, practical and easily accessible materials. Therefore, newspapers will make learning more activity-oriented and a happy experience.

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