

Using the news in the classroom

Teaching is a transformational process in the sense that it modifies us continuously, and teacher educators at the university level must provide the leadership needed to revamp their own programs. News, press, e-mail communication and Internet availability, influence both teachers and learners in profound ways. These media can be profitably used to provide training that is not only site-based, but also contextual and specific to the individual needs of the students.

The classroom should be an extension of the learner's world. In an everyday situation the learner is exposed to both written and oral information coming from the press and TV. The students are given practical tasks oriented to enhance their thinking power and develop their critical skills. The teacher should decide when it is the most convenient moment to expose the students to mass media information. Teachers should consider text structure, length, linguistic difficulty (including vocabulary), and content. Attention should also be drawn to the discovery of the macro structure of the whole text. The learner should be able to recognize different patterns, such as a presentation an argumentation or debate, or a sequencing of events presented in a narrative text. A teacher may begin with a review of the current news. Discussion may focus on issues and trends unfolding in the news.

Topics about human condition, family relationships, education, environmental problems, or issues of everyday life, provide interesting material as long as they are universal enough to be understood. The learner is actively involved in solving problems through hands-on tasks that involve locating and extracting specific information, matching, sequencing, selecting appropriate answers, agreeing / disagreeing with certain statements, taking notes, summarizing, and so on. Using the traditional five Ws as the basic procedure the students are gradually lead to the general and then to a more detailed comprehension of the text in question.

Finally, the learners should be able to give one of the many possible versions of this interpretation: their own, based on the material that has just been read.