

Combining Guided Reading and Cooperative Learning Method in Theoretical Subject Classes

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A. Introduction

Traditionally, theoretical subject classes like morphology and phonetics and phonology are conducted in lecturing method in which teachers present the topic, explain the materials, open questions and answers or discussion forum, then end the class. Throughout the lesson, teachers seem to dominate the class and provide students with only very little time to have discussion or ask questions. Students absorb very little during the class although they are busy taking notes when the teachers speak. This condition is even worsened by the very little knowledge the students have on the topic presented. Students sometimes are too lazy to read on the subject matter before attending the class. Students feel they don't have the obligation to read and to provide themselves with adequate readings before the class because the teachers would provide everything they need to know in the class.

Due to the condition mentioned above, it is believed that there should be a teaching method that would "force" or condition students to a situation where they have to read a lot and a condition that will require them to take the responsibility on not only their own mastery but also their friends' mastery of the materials.

B. Reading

a. Readers' Background Knowledge and Reading Activity

In everyday life we have to face so many forms of written form of language like poster, newspaper, magazine, brochure, story books, street signs, announcements, bills, letters, the list goes on. Readers should be able to recognize the distinctions of these various forms of text. To be able to recognize these texts and their messages, of course, readers need to develop their comprehension skills in reading and relate it to their background

knowledge. It is clearly stated by Anderson, in Nunan (2003:67), who defines reading as the fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning and he also adds that the goal of reading activities is comprehension. Furthermore Anderson also states that reading activities are divided into two namely strategic reading and fluent reading. Strategic reading is defined as the ability of the reader to use a wide variety of reading strategies to accomplish a purpose of reading. Good readers know what to do when they encounter difficulties.

...competent reader will quickly reject the irrelevant information and find what he is looking for. (Grellet, 1981:3)

The second activity is fluent reading. It is defined as the ability to read at an appropriate rate with adequate comprehension. Meaning does not lie in the reader or in the text. Meaning should be created by integrating reader's background knowledge and the text.

b. The purpose of reading

Reading is an activity with purposes. We read for several reasons. Grellet (1981: 4) lists two purposes in reading. They are: reading for pleasure and reading for finding and getting certain information. In addition to that, Rivers (1981:260) states that students who learn language need reading to have access to the literature and periodicals, or scientific and technical journals, written in the language they are learning.

More specifically, Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996:1) say that reading in English specify at least the following importance:

1. Reading helps students to learn to think in English
2. Reading can enlarge English vocabulary
3. Reading can help students improve their writing
4. Reading is a good way to find out about new ideas, facts, and experiences.

c. Reading Involves some Skills

Grellet (1981:4) states that reading involves a variety of skills as follows:

1. Recognizing the script of language

2. Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
3. Understanding explicitly and non explicitly stated information
4. Understanding conceptual meaning
5. Understanding relations within the sentences and between the parts of the text
6. Recognizing indicators in discourse and identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse
7. Extracting salient points to summarize (the text, an idea, etc) and selective extraction of relevant points from a text.

Grellet adds that several activities and exercises can be used to develop those skills mentioned above. The ability to convey those skills in reading activities will lead to students' reading comprehension.

d. Reading Strategies

There are strategies that we can apply in the classroom to help students to read more quickly and effectively. They are:

1. Previewing: reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection
2. Predicting: using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content
3. Skimming and scanning: using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions
4. Guessing from context: using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up
5. Paraphrasing: stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text (<http://www.nclc.org>)

e. Guided Reading

Guided reading is a reading activity in which students read a selected text and explore the text together through discussion, with the teachers support the students' use of the appropriate reading strategies (<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz>). Guided reading activity focuses on at least three aspects: exposing students to wide range of literature, teaching comprehension strategies, and teaching students to read materials that become increasingly more difficult.

Guided reading session has the key objectives to:

1. engage students with the chosen text most appropriate to meet their learning needs and arouse their interests,
2. identify challenges that the text might present and decide how this will be addressed,
3. select and share with students the learning intentions and the success criteria for the session,
4. introduce the readings,
5. discuss new vocabulary with students,
6. engage students in reading and discussing the texts, and
7. make students to respond to the text.

This activity also helps to develop in students:

1. positive attitudes to reading
2. appropriate strategies to gain meaning from texts (inferring, asking questions and seeking clarification, identifying and summarizing , visualizing, identifying the author's purpose and point of view, forming and testing hypotheses
3. close reading skills to enable them to respond to the language and ideas in the text
4. skills to explore language
5. skills to think critically
6. skills to access information and use it effectively

(<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz>)

In implementing guided reading activity in classroom, there are several steps to follow:

1. Preparation

In preparation step, teachers decide the topic to discuss and carefully choose the selected readings. A wide range of text forms can be used in guided reading: stories, articles, reports, recounts, descriptions, instructions, explanations, arguments, extracts from magazines or newspapers, picture books, extracts from novels, and so on. Teachers should have careful planning on conducting guided reading in their classes. They should:

1. plan how the text should be introduced
2. think about the questions that will encourage the students to think critically and discuss issues/ideas
3. think about the follow up activity that will extend the reading of the text
4. plan something for those who finish first e.g. other books on the topic to read/browse, maps to explore, a dictionary, a thesaurus
5. think about purposeful activities for the rest of the class.
6. set clear objectives of the reading activity

2. Introducing the Text

Teacher introduces the text and explains a little about the topic. Teachers introduce the text by giving students a list of questions related to the topic. The answers to the questions can be found in the text. Teachers should also encourage students to:

1. plan and ask questions
2. make predictions about the text to be read
3. discuss their expectations of the text

3. Reading the text

Students read the text silently to themselves. The teacher observes the students as they read, noting problems or difficulties that need to be followed up later.

4. Responding to and discussing the text

The discussion should not be just a question and answer session. Teachers should always: encourage focused conversations to extend students' comprehension and critical thinking, use questions and prompts

to explore their understandings, and ask students to justify and clarify their ideas, drawing on evidence from the text.

5. Follow up

This stage may be valuable to extend the students' understanding on the text discussed. This also will be useful to give feedback to the students and to obtain feedback from the students about the text. An effective guided reading session gives the teacher the opportunity to:

1. observe and find out about the skills the students are using or need to develop
2. decide how successful the lesson was in developing close reading skills
3. plan further lessons based on the needs and interests of the students.

(<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz>)

C. Cooperative Learning

a. What is Cooperative Learning?

Teaching can be conducted making use of different kinds of method. One of the teaching methods is cooperative learning. Slavin (1995:2) argues that cooperative learning is a variety of teaching method in which students work in small groups to help one another to learn academic content. In cooperative classroom, students are expected to help each other, to discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge and fill in gaps in each other's understanding.

b. Why Cooperative Learning?

Slavin (1995:2-3) states that there are several reasons why cooperative learning should be implemented in educational practice. Among those reasons are:

1. there is a number of research showing that cooperative learning support the increase in student's achievement, improve intergroup relations, improve acceptance of academically handicapped classmates, and increase self-esteem.

2. the growing awareness that students need to learn to think, to solve problems, and to integrate and apply knowledge and skills, and that cooperative learning is an excellent means to achieve that goal.

c. Cooperative Learning or Simply Work Group?

There is a difference between simply having students work in a group and students in structured groups designed to work cooperatively. Johnson and Johnson (1998) argues that a group of students sitting at the same table doing their own work but free to talk with each other as they work, is not structured to be a cooperative group, as there is no positive interdependence. Furthermore they state that there needs to be certain regulation to be called a cooperative group such as an accepted common goal on which the group is rewarded for its efforts.

In Addition to that, Johnson and Johnson (1998) also argue that if a group of students has been assigned to do a report, but only one student does all the work and the others do nothing but take advantage (like extra score) from their friend's efforts, it is not a cooperative group. The students' success as a group depends on their ability to ensure that everyone has grasped the key ideas (Slavin, 1995:2). Johnson and Johnson (1998), to strengthen their argument, say that putting students into groups will not automatically gain a cooperative relationship without the teachers managing and supervising the groups.

d. Which Cooperative Learning Technique to Implement in Class?

Slavin (1995:5) classifies cooperative learning into several applicable techniques as follow:

1. Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)

Students sit in groups of four consist of very heterogeneous team members. The teacher present the lesson, then students work in the group to make sure all team members master the lesson. After that, the students do an individual quiz on the material in which they are not allowed to help each other.

2. Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)

It uses the same technique as STAD but the quiz is replaced by a tournament. In the tournament, students compete with the member of other teams. The winner will bring extra point for the group.

3. Jigsaw II

It uses the same group division like in STAD and TGT. In Jigsaw II, each student is assigned a certain topic or material to read and to study. The students with the same topic from each team will sit together and form an “expert” team, then have discussion on the topic. After a while, they will have to go back to their own team and explain the material to the team member.

4. Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI)

In general, members work in different unit based on their rate on placement test. Teammates check on each other’s works using an answer sheet and help one another with any problems. Final tests are taken without teammates’ help and scored by student monitors.

5. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)

CIRC is a comprehensive program for teaching reading and writing. Students work in teams to study the text given (usually novels or basal reading) then prepare a report, comment or publication on the text.

Any techniques of cooperative learning to implement in classroom will depend on the teacher’s knowledge on the students’ learning needs and expectations, students’ learning strategy and styles, also students’ behavior and attitude toward the lesson.

D. The Characteristics of Theoretical Subject Classes

In English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University, subjects like phonetics and phonology and morphology are considered as theoretical subjects since they provide students with theoretical knowledge on basic linguistic like the organization speech sounds, articulatory phonetics, morphemes, word forms, word formation, and so on. Unlike the skill subject classes - like speaking, listening, reading, and writing - which have only limited number of students, the theoretical subject classes usually consist of more than 20 students and with some student repeaters from the upper semester.

To be able to perform well in the class, students are expected to read some books related to the topic. They are also required to browse the internet to add to their own understanding on the subject matter. Although required to do so, it appears that students do not do what they are obliged to do. Students come to

class with very little (or even zero) knowledge on the subject matter. Students mostly sit nicely in class listening to lecturers' presentation, never ask questions, and eventually come up with nothing at all. They absorb very little from the lecturers' explanation. Some students do not perform well in final examination and can not produce good paper works.

E. The Classroom Implementation

a. First Step

On the first meeting, the lecturers usually give the orientation to the course then introduce the syllabus. This is also the right time to introduce the teaching-learning activities and the rules of conduct of the class. The lecturers can also list the books they need to have and read during the semester. To save reading time, in each meeting, teachers should always ask students to read on certain topic before the next meeting.

b. Group Formation

In formatting the groups there are several ways to do.

1. Teachers' authority to form the groups.

This is mostly effective when teachers know their students ability, learning styles, and learning strategies. Teachers should avoid grouping students with the same ability and competency otherwise these students will not go anywhere during the semester. A mix ability group is so much better and it is mostly suitable with the principle of a cooperative learning. Conflict often arises in teacher –chosen groups.

2. Students do the formation.

Sometimes students feel more comfortable working with their close friends. When they can get along well with the teammates, they can do more and perform better in the group. In this kind of group formation, teachers should always supervise and manage the group since the close relationship of the members of the teams may sometimes lead to students doing very little work but talking too much on things that are not related to the subject matter. A mix ability member should also be given concern here.

Students can stay in the same group the whole semester when points and rewards are to be involved in the lessons. To avoid students' boredom from doing the works with the same persons, teachers can shift the members of the team.

c. Class Activity

In traditional classes, teachers will have to present the whole material during the class session. In guided reading method, teachers should open the lesson by introducing the topic, encouraging students to express their expectation on the lesson, engage students background knowledge on the subject to discuss, and explain a little on the matter. It would be better to arouse the students' interest by giving examples, pictures, or diagrams related to the topic then leave the rest of the works to the students.

The next step is to distribute the list of questions/tasks related to the material. The tasks should cover the whole things the students need to know on the topic. The number of the questions should be varied depends on the area of the discussion. The tasks should cover certain skills of reading wrapped in comprehension question, problem solving task, providing examples for the task, etc.

e.g.:

Subject : Phonetics and Phonology

Topic : Phones, Phonemes, and Allophones

Subtopic : Allophones

Task :

1. How do you define allophones?
2. An allophone is rule governed. Explain what is meant by this statement and clarify your answer with examples!
3. [i] and [i̥] are allophones of the phoneme / i /. Explain briefly and specify the rule that governs the two phones!
4. Can you mention other examples of allophones in English?

Students should perform the task given based on teachers instruction and follow the steps specified by the teachers. Students should read from the books, discuss it with the teammates, and help each other with the problems. During the class

work, teachers should maintain the structured works and manage the classroom. Teachers can also go wander around the class to check each student's understanding and progress of work. They should also help students to apply their reading strategies to save time and to have better understanding on the reading.

d. End of Lesson

After reading and doing the discussion, students should report the result of the reading and discussion. The reports can be in written reports or in oral presentation form. When one student/group does the reporting, the other groups may add or argue the answers. Teachers should give feedback to the students and set the next activities. Reward and praise should always be given to students who have done the works.

F. Conclusion

Reading is a skill that should be taught to students. To arouse students' interest in reading, sometimes teachers need to modify certain methods than apply it in the class. One of the applicable method to help students' reading comprehension is guided reading method in which teachers keeping the supervision and the discussion work. When it is combined with cooperative learning, guided reading can bring the classroom to live. This combination can also eliminate unhealthy competition among students, increase students' self esteem and create very tolerant students who help each other to achieve the same goal.

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