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PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY IN EFL READING

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the advantages of partnership activity in EFL reading classroom. Understanding a reading text may provide a challenge for some students as it involves a particular context and previous knowledge. For English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, the challenge becomes more complex as they need to understand the words and the written symbols of the foreign language and take the meaning of the sentence by making sense them with its context which may be unfamiliar to them. For this reason, choosing an activity that provides a wider opportunity for EFL students to share their thought and understanding of what they read as well as to listen others comprehension of the similar text is necessary in order to help the students have an accurate meaning of the text and learn how to be an effective reader. In this light, partnership activity is considered to be one of alternative ways to create an enjoyable and meaningful experience for EFL students to develop their reading skill of another language. The benefits of partnership activity include individual concerns and social life.

Keywords: *Partnership activity; EFL learners; reading classroom.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of major important skills that need to be mastered by language learners. It involves a complex process which includes not only physical activity but also emotional interest. In reading, the readers need to understand the text to make this activity meaningful. For English language learners, reading has its own challenges considering that there are some aspects that need to be known in understanding the text. In this case, the understanding of grammar and vocabulary will help the learners to grasp the meaning of the context as well as the knowledge of

recognition, content background knowledge, synthesization and evaluation, and metacognitive skills (Ediger, 2001, p.154). Considering that reading is a complex process, teachers need to be aware how to direct the students have meaningful experiences in reading class. In a classroom, the activity of reading can be taught in various ways and one of them is by grouping students in partnership. Partnership strategy is often used in classroom to motivate the students to engage in teaching-learning activities.

DISCUSSION

Teaching Reading

Reading is considered as a complex process which involves a sequence of written symbols that need to be understood to get the meaning of the text (Ediger, 2001). The meaning of reading activity, right now, not only puts a transaction between the reader and the text but also involves socio-context. During the reading process, there is a connection between reader's past experience and the written content (Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 1995). Whatever one's path and knowledge in the past is reflected in their thought and mind which affect the way he/she interpretes the meaning of the context at present. Competent reading is "an active process in which the readers calls on experience, language, and schemata to anticipate and understand the author's written language" (Roe et al., 1995, p.4). This process happens for both English language learners and English native speakers. However, for foreign language learners, teachers need to do some adjustments in teaching-learning process because the learners read the text of different language and cultural background. 'Language background' and 'cultural framework' influence the readers' interpretation of the phenomena (Hudelson, as cited in Ediger, 2001, p.154).

In ESL learning contexts, the teacher has to be aware about background knowledge and cultures of students. They should really know the characteristics of their students to avoid the mistakes in interacting and choosing the materials that have to be presented in front of the class. Some aspects, such as pictures go with text, left to right written text, words are written separately from each other, punctuation, rules of written language, must be a concern of the teacher in presenting and doing assistance in class (Ediger, 2001). Cultural differences can affect students'

comprehension of printed material, facial expressions, body movements, and gestures (Nettles, 2006). In this light, teachers need to help their students to be familiar with the language rules and literacy of their new language. Providing background information and previewing are particularly important for the less proficient language student (Long & Richards, 1987).

In choosing the strategy that can be applied in class, the teacher can use more than one activity for the same text depend on the needs of the class and the purpose of reading activity whether it is “to search for information, for general comprehension, to learn new information, or to synthesize and evaluate information” (Grabe & Stoller, 2001, p. 187). Teaching reading can be done as a class activity or as an individual work. As individual work, the teacher can give independent reading time per day or do retelling activity. Meanwhile, as class activity, the teacher can group the students by dividing them into small group discussion, such as peer-led literature circle, partnerships, interest group, and research or needs group (Roe et al., 1995). Class activity is considered more engaged and more motivated for students because it gives the students more opportunities to share their ideas and compare their comprehension with others. It is interesting to encourage comparisons between several interpretations of a text which will lead to discussion and probably a need to refer back to the text to check (Grellet, 1981).

To provide an effective group, teachers may put the students in heterogeneous or in homogenous ability group depend on the material and the activities. In addition, the teachers can let the students to choose the reading activities wanted. “When all the students are ready to read the selection text, assign the students to read in one of four ways: With partners, independently, with the teacher, or in a small group without the teacher” (Nettles, 2006, p. 324). It is useful to meet the needs of the students. The students who need less support can read the text independently or with partners. Students who need more support can read it with other students in a small group, led by the teacher or by a peer.

The Concept of Partner Reading

Partner reading is one of class activities that allows the students to work together to read a variety of texts. It is an enjoyable way for two students to complete a

reading assignment or share a story. It “helps to bridge the gap between relying on the teacher too much and reading more independently” (Heren & Bickerman, 2005, p.18). Working as partners guide the students to help each other and share their ideas in a comfortable situation. The pairs will be able to freely talk what they have read with a small risk. A greater diversity of views and beliefs can be expressed. “This will be stimulating for the weaker students, while the better ones will not feel held back” (Grellet, 1981, p.11).

In partner reading activity, “the students are presented with a task to be completed and are allowed to pool their resources in order to complete it successfully” (Roe et al., 1995, p. 265). The cooperation between the students will determine the success of the pairs to complete the tasks. In working as pairs, the students need to know the purpose for their reading and know how they will read together, so the teacher must make those details clear to them (Nettles, 2006). There are some ways to read as partners:

- Back and forth: The partners agree to read one page at a time, switching back and forth.
- Character roles: The partners decide upon character parts to read, and divide the rest of the page.
- Keeping track: The partners take turns keeping track of the print for each other. One partner points to the print, while the other reads aloud for one page; then they switch roles for the next page.
- “6” whispers together: The partners read in choral reading fashion, whispering so that only they can hear each other.
- Say something: Each partner reads silently. When they come to a stop point, the partners say something to each other about the selection so far.
- Question the author: Each partner reads silently. When they come to a stop point, ask them to collaboratively compose a question that they would like to ask the author (Nettles, 2006, p.326).

Moreover, in pairs, the students can also be directed to do the activities like *in the moment read-aloud journal partners* which is an instructional strategies encompasses many different metacognitive processes that effective readers use, including interpreting the text, pausing to reflect, and engaging in retrospection (Onofrey & Theurer, 2007), or asking the students to choose some reading strategies that can be used to understand the text and then they have to prepare mini lessons for each of these strategies, so they are familiar with each strategy chosen (Heren & Bickerman, 2005).

The teacher must be careful in choosing students for partnership because pairs will work well if they can support each other and feel comfortable with their discussion. Generally, students of similar reading ability are paired together. Sometimes, a more competent reader is paired with a less competent one, and the more able reader reads aloud and the less able follows along. This enables the less able reader to follow the text visually with little or no pressure. In this case, the teacher must be smart to see her students' ability and characteristics to lead each pair can work well in completing the assignments and tasks.

The advantages of Partner-Reading Activity for Students: An analysis

Based on the previous discussions, as one of grouping activities, partner reading provides the students many benefits. These benefits are not only for individual concern but also for social life. Developing oral language skills and be exposed to vocabulary words, becoming more curious about the reading task, obtaining immediate feedback on the ideas, giving a safe learning environment and increasing their sense of community are some advantages of partnership activities.

Working in pairs provides more opportunity for English students to practice their language skills and to learn technical vocabulary (Alverman & Phelps, 2002). When they discuss the reading text, the students directly practice their speaking and listening. Although they could still use their first language, the English reading text force them to use or quote some vocabulary from the text. If the teacher encourages them to actively communicate in English, the students will have more practice. In the classroom discussions, the students are also exposed to new vocabulary words that they can try to find out the meaning together.

Partner reading activity also gives students immediate feedback on their ideas about a text. The ways of partnership reading activity conducted in class usually put them on the track to speak and share their ideas together. The students have to respond each other and express their opinions about his or her pair opinions. These sharing moments bring them to solution because they need to get an agreement about the text to complete the assignment or to present their opinions in front of the class as part of the class activity.

Becoming more curious about the reading task that follows is another positive effect of partnership in reading class. The activity which gives the students more freedom to decide each person's role in pair make them more engaged to the material and the task and more motivated to understand and involve in every activity. If they meet an excitement during the discussion session, the students will become more curious about the next reading task. They will have a curiosity about what the next story or topic that will be offered, how the discussion will be done, and so forth. In this case, the ability of the teacher to direct the activity and to choose the appropriate and interesting material for the class is crucial.

Other advantage of partner-reading is that it creates a safe environment to take risks. For some students, teaching-learning process often put them in a difficult position, especially for activity which much involves a discussion or presentation. Partner-reading offers only a small risk compared with discussing the subject matter directly in front of all students in the classroom. For shy-quiet students, it really helps them to take a part or contribute to the discussion and to increase their self-confidence.

Furthermore, partner-reading provides a valuable experience for students to interact with their peers. The interactions during the discussions require each student to compromise his/her ideas to have one solution. This condition can reduce the competition between individual students and promotes a sense of community (Alverman & Phelps, 2002). They learn how to deal with diverse opinions and to work together in a group. It is important to eliminate their ego as individual to learn diversity in a small scope. Thus, the students will be friendlier to the differences around them.

CONCLUSION

The concept of partnership in reading class is useful to help students to gain knowledge as well as to improve their social skills. Working in pairs provides more opportunity for English learning students to practice their language skills, to learn technical vocabulary, and to benefit from peer teaching. Partner reading leads students receive immediate feedback on their ideas about a text. This activity also provides students a safe environment to take risks in reading activity so their self confidence in their own reading ability increases. Furthermore, partner reading can also reduce the competition between individual students and promotes group interdependence and a sense of community. However, the success of this concept in implementation depends on the teacher in guiding the students playing their roles in pairs and in choosing an appropriate and interesting material. In this sense, the teacher must be aware to classroom and students' condition, and must be a good facilitator who is able to manage the class well.

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