

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES: USEFUL AIDS IN THE CLASSROOM

Jornais e Revistas: Recursos Úteis em Sala de Aula

Zeitungen und Zeitschriften: eine didaktische Hilfe in der Klasse

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SUMMARY

The first part of this paper presents a series of arguments advocating the use of newspapers and magazines in the classroom. Besides being a permanent source of education, this medium presents a variety of authentic communication materials which can be usefully handled in foreign language classes. The second part provides a list of activities as suggestions for teachers to develop with students of different levels.

RESUMO

A primeira parte deste trabalho apresenta uma série de argumentos que advogam o uso de jornais e revistas, em sala de aula, pois, além de fontes permanentes de educação, contém uma grande quantidade de material de comunicação autêntica. Tais recursos são de utilização eficaz em aulas de língua estrangeira, sendo apresentada uma série de sugestões de atividades na segunda parte deste trabalho.

Newspapers and magazines are undoubtedly responsible for making the world smaller as far as media, in general, lessen the distance among the countries, being highly responsible for cultural renewal, changes in one's way of life, the death of certain habits and the birth of new ones. It is therefore important to bring the press into the classrooms and handle this kind of material in a wider range of varied activities.

It is inconceivable, nowadays, to accept traditional education based only on texts from the past, either literary or didactic. Past values should be compared with the present ones, so that the new generations may settle in and adjust themselves to our present world. We live the present; from the past we take the lessons, but our hardest task is to learn how to cope with the present, analyzing, criticizing and judging the facts, and finally taking the positions which we think are the correct ones.

Journalism is a permanent source of education and, in the moment school promotes the habit of reading newspapers and magazines, it will be asserting the continuity of a democratic education, open to everyone who wants to participate in it, without prejudices and social or economic restrictions, as real subjects of the educational process and not as second fiddles in the orchestra.

Every academic subject can be helped by this vehicle as a source of new information. Today's history, lived day by day, is well spread out through

the pages of newspapers and magazines. The new discoveries, in the different fields of science, are issued every day. Political events, information about contemporary literature, literary criticism, reports about the edition of important books, etc., etc., can be found in various newspapers and magazines.

The "longing for knowing" is a basic need of human beings. It does not matter what: things like gossips, facts, recipes for living well, cooking recipes, social and political news, the up-to-date technological inventions, all of this, and even more, is part of our universe of curiosity. Whenever the press satisfies people's curiosity, it is, at the same time, giving its contribution for the individual formation. The reader gets to know facts, makes up his opinions, guides himself, and fills his mental files with more topics to feed his conversation.

Newspapers and magazines are good instruments for debates, and it is in the quest for solutions that the press language dresses itself with the characteristics of fight and disagreement, printing in the paper the constant search for the satisfaction of human needs such as love, comfort, justice, applause, happiness, etc.

Besides informing and therefore forming the person, this kind of reading has also the aim of making the reader enjoy himself. One can easily find comic strips, puzzles, jokes, horoscope, etc. There is also a variety of plastic treatment given

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to words and a variety of linguistic registers since we can find all kinds of writings: poetry, reports, synthetic news, essays, letters, telegrams, abstracts, advertisements, and so on.

We all know that each communication medium undergoes the pressure of certain dominant forces, which may be political or economical. Researchers have demonstrated that the great majority of the readers does not believe entirely in what they read. Critical readers always doubt the truth of the reports because they are generally stuffed with personal and/or biased opinions. On the other hand, powerful countries do interfere in the way "underdeveloped" countries see the world. As they have the control of information, they affect our press without great efforts. Newspapers as "Le Monde", "The New York Times", "The Economist", and "The Times" are permanent sources of information for South American newspapers. Instead of going straight to the facts, the editors/reporters feed themselves with information gotten from foreign newspapers and magazines, and readers see the facts through the eyes of other countries.

Thus, it is important to create in our students the habit of reading different kinds of newspapers and magazines, so that they can see the two sides of the coin and avoid the ideological influence of this or that vehicle.

So far we have discussed the general importance of newspapers and magazines for the global formation of a person. In foreign language classes proper, the use of printed media is a way to put students in contact with meaningful and contextualized language. Among the goals which such material may achieve are the following:

- to handle authentic communication materials;
- to bring present information into the classroom;
- to be in contact with the target culture in order to collate cultural attitudes and values;
- to increase vocabulary;
- to develop creativity through creative activities;
- to study syntactic and semantic aspects in real context.

Newspapers and magazines may sometimes present difficult obstacles, even for teachers. The Sports Section, for instance, may present words from a register we cannot understand either because of a gap in our language mastery or due to cultural problems — we know that popular sports vary from culture to culture and it is really difficult to read about some specific sports like golf or baseball, for example. The selection of material is then of highest importance and the teacher must be sure that:

- the material presents a subject which fulfills the students' expectations and real interests;
- the text fits the level of the class;
- all the vocabulary problems can be solved.

From now on, I would like to present some suggestions of activities for teachers to develop with students of different levels. Although some sugges-

tions involve more than one skill or knowledge, they will be listed under the following "headlines": listening, speaking, vocabulary, reading, writing, grammar and literature/style.

I — LISTENING

The teacher may:

1. read a series of headlines and ask the students to copy words which rhyme with a certain sound;
2. read a text aloud and ask the students to write down the physical characteristics of a person, the adjectives used to describe a place, etc.;
3. give students extracts of a news report with some missing words to be completed after the teacher's reading of the text;
4. give students a group of headlines and ask them to number each one according to the sequence of the teacher's reading of the corresponding "leads";
5. divide the class in groups, say, four groups of four elements. Each group will receive a news report or a different version of the same news. After reading and discussing the main points of the news, students are asked to change places and the new group must have a student from each previous group. All the students will then make an oral report of the news previously read and answer all the questions asked by the other elements of the group;
6. ask the students to answer the following questions: Who? What? When? Why? How? after the teacher's reading of a news report.

II — SPEAKING

The teacher may:

1. Give the students schedules of TV programmes in order to have controlled conversation, e.g. student A asks student B what he is going to watch on TV that night;
2. ask the students to spell headlines;
3. give the students news reports and ask them to justify the choice of the headline. They may also be asked to suggest other possible headlines;
4. develop a "drama" lesson having a news report as departure;
5. ask the students to read headlines aloud in order to practice intonation (the weak forms generally come in small letters);
6. ask the students to work in pairs after reading the Social Column. Student A asks student B when a famous person was born, who died that day, what Mr. X is celebrating, etc.

III — VOCABULARY

The teacher may:

1. ask the students to look for words and expressions in English (or another foreign language) in Brazilian newspapers. The students can be asked to
 - a) explain the meaning of the words and expressions in the target language;
 - b) try to find corresponding expressions in Portuguese;
 - c) study the prefixes and suffixes and/or some other kind of word formation;
2. ask the students to look for cognates in foreign newspapers and magazines. They can also look for words which are familiar to Brazilian students;
3. ask the students to collect words from headlines and then separate the parts of the words (prefixes and suffixes) by means of a pair of scissors in order to form new words, trying out new combinations;
4. ask groups of students to solve crossword puzzles (dictionaries may be used or not);
5. ask the students to find out taboo words and euphemisms for themes like "death", "illness", "homosexuality", etc.
6. ask the students to analyze the language used to describe weddings, burials, birthdays, baptisms, etc. in order to find out the vocabulary which appears most when such events are reported;
7. ask the students to select, in a group of similar reports, the adjectives employed to support prejudices, tendencies, attitudes and opinions;
8. ask the students to make a list of foreign words to detect influences of other languages;
9. ask the students to read the "headline" and then find in the "lead" similar or opposite meanings.
e.g. MR. X MURDERED...
Mr. x was killed yesterday...;
10. ask the students to make a list of phrasal verbs found in news reports with their corresponding meanings.

IV — READING

The teacher may:

1. ask the students to read ads selling or renting houses and then try to make a design of one of the houses;
2. give the students news reports followed by photographs and ask them to underline, in the written text, all the words and expressions

which have something to do with the photograph;

3. give the students texts followed by wh-questions and/or yes/no questions, multiple choice exercises, True and False, diagrams to be filled in, sentences to be completed, etc., in order to check comprehension;
4. ask the students to make predictions after reading the headline and then, after scanning the text, underline the predicted words which appear in it;
5. ask the students to separate real information from opinions;
6. ask the students to compare news reports on the same topic, from different newspapers and magazines, in order to find out differences and similarities;
7. ask the students to rewrite a news report presenting opinions which are opposed to those found in that report;
8. ask the students to delete obvious information in a text. e.g. Ronald Reagan, *the president of the USA*;
9. ask the students to find out, in a given newspaper or magazine, texts which inform the reader, try to convince the reader to do something and others whose function is just to entertain the reader;
10. give the students a series of reports of the same event, in sequence, and ask them to separate the new pieces of information from the old ones.

V — WRITING:

The teacher may:

1. ask the students to fill in all kinds of coupons;
2. ask the students to write full descriptions of houses, flats, etc. after reading ads about them;
3. give the students headlines or synthetic news and ask them to write a report using proper adjectives and relative clauses. (It would be better if the students were given news already published in their native language);
4. ask the students to write letters to magazines and newspapers in order to criticize, give opinions, ask for information, complain, etc. The students may also be asked to play the role of an editor and answer the reader's letters.
5. ask the students to write telegrams of congratulation to those who are celebrating their birthdays, or other kinds of telegrams;
6. ask the students to reduce an interview into a small dialogue, keeping the basic meaning;
7. ask the students to transform a dialogue into a narrative and vice-versa;

8. ask the students to write a single text by joining up all the information or new facts about a certain event the students have read about during a period of time;
9. ask the students to translate headlines from Portuguese into English and vice-versa;
10. After reading a news report about a protesting act, students may be asked to write down sentences which might have been used during the protest. Ex. "Go away!" "Keep out of our temples!*

VI — GRAMMAR

The teacher may:

1. give the students schedules of TV programmes and ask them to make up sentences to practice verb tenses, for instance:
e.g. BBC1 is going to show FAME at 7.40 today.
Londoners watched FAME yesterday;
2. ask the students to read Social News and then write questions such as "How old is...?" "When was... born?" Papers will then be exchanged with a partner and answers provided;
3. ask the students to complete the headlines with the deleted items. (copula, for example);
4. ask the students to find out the deep structure of the headlines;
5. ask the students to find illustrations for grammatical rules, e.g. Verbs followed by the gerund;
6. ask the students to find out grammatical deviations, e.g. it is common to find the subjunctive form "were" replaced by "was";

7. ask the students to make a list of verbs used to report speeches;
8. ask the students to find out similar attitudes from different countries and then make up sentences with "so" and "neither" patterns.

VII — LITERATURE/STYLE

The teacher may:

1. ask the students to find poetic devices in the headlines (rhyme, alliteration, etc.);
2. ask the students to identify the metaphors and separate the original from the overused ones;
3. ask the students to detect ambiguities in the headlines;
4. ask the students to make a list of clichés;
5. ask the students to find intertextuality. For example, "Big Brother", from "the Brave New World", is a common expression found in newspapers and magazines;
6. ask the students to analyze poems and short stories published in newspapers and magazines;
7. ask the students to find out the elements of tragedy in criminal news;
8. give the students a criminal news report and ask them to analyse the text as if it were a literary text by means of psychoanalysis approach or any other approach;
9. guide students into the identification of "indirect speech acts", for instance, find the disguised menaces in a speech;
10. ask the students to find out rhetorical devices as hyperboles, antithesis, etc.

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