

## Article 11 in LCPJ

# Benefits of Using Newspapers, Magazines and Books in Classroom

### Abstract

This paper aims at giving an overall view of the outstanding advantages that the usage of various mass media in the classroom is able to provide to students and teachers simultaneously. "The mass media are the most pervasive features of modern life. They inform, amuse, startle, anger, entertain, thrill, but very seldom leave anyone untouched" (Biagi, 1996). Newspapers, magazines, books, Internet, records, radio and television, are all powerful and endless sources of information that can be easily compared to a library or an encyclopedia; primarily because they give to the reader the opportunity to extend knowledge and they facilitate self-education. Access to media is a crucial thing from a pedagogical point of view: the variety of subjects and topics that they cover make mass media interesting and motivating for the students to work with. This paper shows in general how print media in particular help students and teachers to gather, contrast, analyze and classify information, concepts and perspectives. The focus has been laid on the use of newspapers, magazines and books in the classroom with the students and by the teachers.

### Introduction

"One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." (Carroll, 2007)

Like Alice, many educators, policy makers and even the general public respond resoundingly with "That's impossible!" when challenged to adopt a new paradigm of education for the 21st century. Most people today adhere to a paradigm of education that is strictly 19th century. They consider the usage of various media in the classroom as irrelevant. But, like the Queen, a growing number of educators and learners are believing in and accomplishing "the impossible". They are embracing new technologies and they are incorporating them into their day-to-day teaching and learning experiences.

One of the most powerful and rewarding instructional tools at our fingertips as teachers and lifelong learners is the usage of print media in the classroom. Through them, within seconds, an entire civilization or country, thousands of kilometers away, is displayed in front of our students. Questions that would have taken hours to find an answer to are not only answered but expounded upon.

## **The advantages of using print media in the classroom**

Throughout the last two decades, the use of various types of mass media by the educators and for the students has been a debatable issue among teachers in general and among teachers of foreign languages in particular. The idea of making use of newspapers, and magazines in the classroom has undergone many controversies.

This ongoing debate served me as a starter point in preparing a questionnaire in relation to the degree of the actual usage of the print media in the classroom as well as in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of their usage. What was surprising to find out was that it was mainly the students that preferred using print media in the classroom rather than the teachers. To some extent, this is comprehensible, because the usage of print media in the classroom implies much more time and resources spent by the teacher on working over the activities to be organized.

So as to better illustrate the advantages of the use of the three types of print media in question – newspapers, magazines and books, while teaching and learning, let us make a presentation of each of these prominent media and their respective advantages.

### **Print Media**

Newspapers, magazines and books comprise the three most important representatives of the printed media. They are all widely used by teachers and students altogether in their daily activities, but when it comes to using them within the classroom environment the situation becomes a bit complicated. This is mainly due to the amount of time teachers need to prepare and adapt articles taken from newspapers and magazines into their classrooms. But, if we compare the usage of articles in the classroom with that of a video for example, the amount of time needed and the tools needed to organize such activities are fewer. No television set is required, no electricity needed and the cost of purchase of items such as a newspaper or a magazine is rather low. What is more, newspapers, magazines and books are now easily accessed and as such students themselves can contribute in the collection of these materials that will later on be used in their teaching and learning environment.

### **Newspapers**

Newspapers bring to our students real life situations and can be easily used as authentic materials. Newspaper-based activities engage students in interesting and enjoyable activities and they also encourage them to further reading. They usually reflect the culture of a certain community through the language they contain. Newspapers also reflect the changes in the language as well, and in doing so, help students and teachers keep up pace with such changes. Most newspapers are linguistically up-to-date and provide valuable linguistic data` (Tafari, 2004).

What is more, newspapers provide a wide range of various text types and language styles, which are not always found in textbooks. This is one of the most important features of newspaper-based activities. This wide variety serves as an excellent tool in the hands of the teacher while organizing exercises dealing with phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax or discourse.

Another great advantage of newspapers is that they can serve as a motivating medium in encouraging and stimulating students to read further and to engage themselves in the activities organized. They report real-life events that are of actual importance and emotional value to the students, and this arouses their curiosity. "People learn through reading, and reading about interesting new things in one's interest subject, undoubtedly helps motivation" (Sanderson, 2002). As motivation is one of the major problems in our educational system nowadays, the media in general should be widely used so as to stimulate and motivate students to actively participate in the classroom and to succeed in their studies. The results of the questionnaire showed that more than 85% of the students participating in the survey preferred the use of newspaper in the classroom rather than that of textbooks and considered this not only as an educational tool but also as a relaxing one. "Teaching should be fun, and through the use of newspapers teachers can make this real" was one of the comments given by a third year foreign language student.

The varieties of newspapers offer extensive opportunities to the teachers that decide to apply them in their classrooms, but in doing so the teachers should take into consideration many issues such as the length of the article, the complexity of the language, the subject matter and content, the time available as well as the level of the students.

In choosing suitable newspaper materials to use in the classroom, the teacher may use some pre-activities and while-activities that can be used in combination with one another. Some of them are listed below (Sanderson, 2002):

- ❖ Give the students the material before the lesson, ask them to look for vocabulary as home work
- ❖ Explain key vocabulary in the materials
- ❖ Summarize the newspaper item
- ❖ Ask the students to brainstorm what they know about the newspaper item
- ❖ Let your students read a newspaper report
- ❖ Tell the students the headline and show any accompanying photograph

- ❖ Before reading, write on the board and explain key vocabulary, then ask the students to use a dictionary during the activity
- ❖ Encourage your students to go for the overall meaning of the text, rather than understand every word
- ❖ Encourage your students to bring to their reading their own world knowledge
- ❖ Try to help the students in understanding the grammatical complexity of the text, facilitate to assimilate the density of information, guess the low-frequency vocabulary, etc.

As seen from this list of activities, newspapers can be easily used not only in regard to linguistic aspects of the language, but they are also fruitful in regard to extra linguistic elements such as critical thinking or world knowledge. As newspapers cover actual issues which are of high interest to our students, then this is a very good reason that should stimulate teachers to use them while teaching.

## **Magazines**

Magazines are another representative group of the printed media. Their purpose is exactly the same as that of newspapers, to inform, entertain and persuade the public as well as to offer a means for targeted advertising. As such they could very easily be used just like newspapers. Their advantage is that they are much more colorful than newspapers and they offer many opportunities to the teachers to organize photograph activities that could stimulate verbal and/or written stories. For instance, they could be used to introduce colors, means of transport, fables and short stories and other stimulating activities as well. Nowadays, there are magazines suitable for every age group which makes the decision making much easier.

From the analysis of the questionnaire prepared in this regard it resulted that children and teenagers were very attracted by magazines because they were child-friendly, full of pictures and colors. This high interest that this generation shows in reading magazines should be further on exploited by the educators to up-to-date their teaching materials and to break the monotony of the textbook-based lessons. Children and teenagers who have been turned off by textbooks may be motivated to read magazines.

As a parallel line can easily be drawn between newspapers and magazines, the advantages and the kind of activities used with the newspapers can be easily applied, adapted and used with magazines as well.

In general, the advantages of using magazines are:

- ❖ They provide a valuable source of authentic materials which can be easily adapted to classroom use. The wide range of topics they cover allows teachers

to use them in many different subjects and occasions. They provide facts, data and stories which can serve as supplements to subject content.

- ❖ Magazines are child friendly as they are full of pictures and colors. Young children especially are easily attracted by colorful magazines and this may serve as a tool to motivate the students' reading skills
- ❖ Magazines offer to students a 'real' natural source of language comprised of words characterized by several connotational components pertaining to a wide variety of language styles, enriching this way the students' passive and active vocabulary.
- ❖ Magazines (similarly to newspapers) are the first to present to our students (and not only) the changes in which the language undergoes and they can do this much faster than textbooks as they are published daily, weekly or monthly.
- ❖ Magazines can also be used basically for the culture they transmit. Since they serve as a country's mirror, students are able to be in contact with the culture of the language they are studying through magazines in particular and printed media in general.

## **Books**

Books are crucial in modern life as well, a driving force in education, business, law, science, medicine and entertainment (Tafari, 2004). Through books the students gain the legacy of knowledge earned by those who came before (Beckert, 1992). Without books (and textbooks are included here), no education could have been possible. They are the primary source of information used by all humanity. After the invention of the typewriter, the printing of the textbooks and books in general reached high peaks and expanded its readership.

Unfortunately, despite the worldwide known value of books, we hear students grumble each day and more about books assigned to be read by their instructors. This is a hotly debated topic in educational spheres. "Books of proven literary worth should be the backbone of the curriculum" (Beckert, 1992). As such, teachers should intentionally make books part of their everyday teaching and learning experience and should always use them in the classroom together with the students so as to nurture them with the love for books. As the statistics showed, more than 68 % of the interviewed people, stated that they read less than two books a year, while 61% of the students interviewed stated that they read only because they were obliged to.

It seems useless to count the advantages that students and humanity in general have by reading books, since no progress in whatever field of study can be imagined without them. They are an indispensable tool used in the classroom. "We can not imagine a

student, a pupil or a teacher without carrying, studying or reading books, being them textbooks, literary, scientific, fiction or whatever” (Tafari, 2004). People of every age group, sex, religion or profession find information, pleasure, relaxation and inspiration while reading books.

In contrast to the other two print media mentioned above, books lack immediacy, but they make up for this by greater thoroughness and permanence. One of the ways in which instructors can make use of books is that of essay writing. Based on a particular story described in a book, every student is able to sit and write his or her own perspective on the events occurred. Apart from extensive benefits in reading skills books offer to students a wide variety of language styles that can later on be adapted by the students themselves in their speaking or writing skills and activities. As seen, and I believe as known by all, books are considered as the most enduring of the mass media and their benefits should always be kept in mind by teachers and students altogether so as to never forget to use them in and out of the classroom.

### Conclusion

Various researches have conducted numerous studies in regard to the advantages that the use of print media in the classroom can bring to students and teachers. The benefits are numerous, but above all they make teaching and learning more exciting and fun. There is a concern in society that television has lured some young people away from school – one tool of bringing them closer to education and of motivating them is by using interesting elements such as the print media.

### References and further readings

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