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Pre-reading activities: what effects do they have on heterogeneous classes?

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects two types of pre-reading activities (pre-questioning and vocabulary pre-teaching) and a control condition on the reading comprehension of 45 students in grade 8 doing the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme in the Netherlands. The groups involved in this study had an advanced level of English but were heterogeneous due to students' diverse nationalities and subsequent multilingual backgrounds. To measure the effects of both pre-reading activities, the participants in the present study read the same short story under the three different conditions. Immediately after reading the story, participants answered an 8-item open-ended test and an 8-item multiple-choice test. The analysis of variance indicated that both pre-reading activities were considerably more effective than the control condition. Further investigation through Tukey's HSD revealed that vocabulary pre-reading activities produced significantly higher scores than the control condition.

Keywords: *pre-reading activities, pre-questioning, vocabulary pre-teaching, schema theory*

Resumo

Este estudo pretende investigar os efeitos de dois tipos distintos de atividades pré-leitura (o pré-questionamento e o pré-ensino de vocabulário) e uma condição controlada sobre a compreensão de leitura concernente a 45 alunos, atualmente frequentando o 8º ano no International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, na Holanda. Apesar dos grupos envolvidos neste estudo terem um nível avançado de Inglês, será sensato considerá-los como heterogêneos, uma vez que são de nacionalidades extremamente diversas e subsequentemente de meios culturais multilingues variadíssimos. De maneira a medir os efeitos de ambas as atividades de pré-leitura, os participantes tiveram acesso ao mesmo texto, sob três diferentes condicionalismos. Imediatamente depois de ler o texto, os participantes responderam um teste aberto de 8 itens e um teste de escolha múltipla também de 8 itens. A análise de variância indicou que ambas as atividades de pré-leitura foram consideravelmente mais eficazes do que a condição de controle. Para além disso, investigações através de Tukey's HSD revelaram que as atividades envolvendo o pré-ensino de vocabulário produziram muito melhores resultados do que os resultados obtidos com a condição de controle.

Palavras-chave: *pré-atividades de leitura, pré-questionamento, pré-ensino de vocabulário*

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Chapter 1

1.1 Previous teaching experience

Teachers should feel compelled to reflect on their lessons on a daily basis. Through reflection teachers not only draw meaning from their own teaching skills and methods but also from learners' behaviours, attitudes and learning processes. A lesson may not have a good outcome for a number of reasons and reflection is an excellent way for teachers to hone their teaching strategies. Farrell (2004:xi) points out that through valuable reflection teachers can “understand the how and why of what they do and have done” and this will make it possible for teachers to become more effective in the classroom. Experience may be a great asset for a teacher but if it isn't combined with reflection it may not serve as much. Coupling reflection with experience is what can lead to professional growth and “teachers who do not bother to reflect on their work can become slaves to routine” (Farrell, 2004:7). Throughout my nine years of experience as a language teacher I have always tried not to surrender to the dangers of routine – if it's not enjoyable for me to teach how will it be enjoyable for my learners to learn? Routine is what can burn you out as a teacher and hinder innovation, which is a powerful tool that can turn a seemingly tedious task into an enjoyable and challenging activity. Just as Roberts (1998:30) points out, “teachers are active agents of their own development”. Teachers must be aware of their faults and be capable of avoiding them or overcoming them on the spot. Over my period of teaching experience, I have learnt to make interactive on-the-spot decisions, because, just as Richards affirms (1994:83) “lessons are dynamic in nature, to some extent unpredictable and characterised by constant change”. There is a constant need to make conscious decisions about what goes on in our classroom. Without conscious decision making, teachers can become controlled by the events rather than be in control of these events. If I wish to develop professionally on a continual basis and be in control of events in my classroom, then reflecting on problematic areas is what will ultimately help me achieve this. However, it is one thing to reflect mentally while thinking back privately on our teaching and another to make a collection of data and analysing it in a study such as this one.

During my teacher training year (2002-2003) at the Garcia de Orta Secondary School, the reflective assessments we were asked to write after having been observed teaching were a useful awareness-raising tool for our teacher development. I was quite lucky to have had the opportunity to teach two classes of my own, in English and in French, unlike the current system where teacher trainees spend a lot of their time observing lessons and only occasionally have the opportunity to teach throughout a one-year teacher training programme. I was fortunate to have taught approximately 120 lessons in English and 100 lessons in French. It was a very arduous training programme that prepared me for what was to come and fostered professional development. It also gave me a comprehensive view of how reading was developed throughout the whole academic year. Pre-reading activities became an interest because I noticed that even though these activities appeared frequently in course books, they were rather repetitive and too generic and at times lacked any power to actually increase learners' conceptual knowledge and bring them closer to improving their understanding of key passages to be encountered in the text. For this reason, I worked on devising my own pre-reading activities and adapting others that I found through research. I created a list of pre-reading activities and since then I have continuously kept adding new activities to that list. It has given me much insight into how I can introduce a text, motivate learners and prepare them for reading.

After completing my training, I started teaching at several language schools and was also given the opportunity to teach French at a state school. The classes I taught at language schools were predominantly elementary to intermediate since at that time I didn't have any experience in preparing students for Cambridge examinations (FCE, CAE, CPE and IELTS). The French classes I taught were elementary to pre-intermediate. Even though all four language skills were covered (listening, speaking, reading and writing), the predominant focus was on grammar. Therefore, I spent the first two years of my professional teaching on devising games and more enjoyable activities with grammar because this was the main focus of the lower level classes I was teaching. At private language schools the syllabus usually focuses on language items covered in Cambridge exams in order to prepare learners for the same structure once they start exam classes later on. Therefore, learners were graded on reading, writing, listening, speaking and use of English. Due to the fact that results in use of

English were generally poorer than the ones achieved in other skills, emphasis was given to incorporating more grammar into the lessons. No extensive reading was included in the syllabus but learners were encouraged to buy the adaptations of fuller texts (which were sold in the language school's foyer), often well-known stories including classics by authors such as Dickens or the Brontës. This is a very good solution for low-level learners because they don't have depth of L2 to help them get through harder texts. However, only a small percentage of learners actually purchased a book and reading skills were not developed enough due to the emphasis on use of English. The syllabus of the French classes I taught at state schools was primarily focused on grammar, reading and writing. Students were not graded on listening and speaking skills and coursebooks did not focus on these skills very much. Reading comprehension tasks were generally comprised of open-ended questions, sentence completion and identification of information in the passage (*true, false, not given*). It was very challenging to maintain high levels of motivation in the classroom because the course book contained very little variety in the typology of tasks with texts, grammar and writing.

In 2005 I started teaching business courses in companies and I used materials from BEC vantage course books so this was obviously a new challenge for me considering I had no background in this area. I also started preparing learners for FCE and CAE examinations. It was a very demanding year because I had to teach business courses and prepare learners for Cambridge examinations and was not given any specific training for it at all. I took the initiative to attend some British Council teacher training workshops in order to become more acquainted with the assessment criteria and gain insight on how to prepare learners for these exams. Cambridge exams have five papers - reading, writing, listening, speaking and use of English - and the final mark on which the grade is awarded is based on the aggregate score of all of the papers. Candidates who perform poorly on one paper can compensate by performing well on the other papers. Maintaining learners' motivation is sometimes a challenge due to the lack of variety of the tasks, which are specifically designed to train learners for the exam. The reading comprehension tasks in Cambridge exams usually include multiple choice questions, multiple matching, gapped texts, choosing suitable paragraph headings from a list, identification of information in the passage (*true, false, not given*), labelling a diagram. In an attempt to maintain a high level of motivation I devised similar tasks to the ones in the exams

using songs, videos, newspapers and magazines and soon realized that this type of approach was much more effective because learners became more enthusiastic and engaged in activities. The simple fact of having an activity that does not require the course book and involves authentic materials which learners are familiar with (or if not familiar intrigued by) spices up any lesson and gives learners a break from their “exam preparation routine” while still focusing on the exam itself. Changing one element in any equation will give you a different result and throughout my experience in preparing students for Cambridge exams it became obvious that using the course book in all lessons led to disinterest and tediousness.

Up until 2007 my experience was primarily at private language schools teaching young learners to adults from elementary to advanced levels. I had also taught French at two state schools at elementary and pre-intermediate levels. In 2007, I started teaching French to students in year 10, 11 and 12 pursuing secretarial studies at a vocational school. Vocational secondary courses are structured by units which means students have to pass 12 units in order to complete the three-year course in French for instance. Due to the fact that the course was organized into units I had to devise a textbook for each unit. Each unit contained 30 sixty-minute lessons and covered topics mostly connected to secretarial studies such as greeting customers, writing formal letters and emails, answering the phone, and so on. The materials used in the textbooks were taken from business-focused course books and the texts were short and simplified due to the fact that learners were all at beginning and pre-intermediate levels. The whole course was more focused on learners acquiring vocabulary related to secretarial studies and therefore a course designed to develop French for specific purposes. Teaching a foreign language for specific purposes requires teaching a lot of specialist vocabulary and the lack of materials available in teaching vocabulary in secretarial studies left me with no other option but to design most of the activities for these courses. However, when devising a text book for a course such as this one, teachers should be careful not to devote too much of the focus on set expressions and vocabulary of a language. Hutchinson & Waters (1987:18) claim that teaching a language for specific purposes is not a matter of “teaching specialised varieties” of a language or “hotel words and grammar for hotel staff and so on”. It is important to focus on underlying structures of language thus adopting an eagle’s eye view of the language. This was taken into account when devising the text books for each of the 12

units to be covered in order to have a variety of items developed and not just specific lexical items or structures.

In 2008, I took up another challenging experience – teaching English to students of music at an Academy of Music. The students were all in year 10, 11 and 12 and the focus of the course was speaking. I was offered this position at the Academy because I had a degree in jazz studies and students at the Academy had to become more familiar with music terminology in English and also express themselves in English when masterclasses led by foreign guests took place at the Academy. I was asked to structure a course that focused on developing speaking skills and music vocabulary. Again, the course was designed for specific purposes and emphasis was given to all subject matters concerning music. Therefore, texts dealt with in class were all related to this topic. The main objective was to widen learners' range of vocabulary in music and learn specific expressions and music terminology in order to be able to follow conductor's instructions or a guest teacher's advice, for instance.

In 2010 I gained experience in teaching in summer schools in the UK and have been teaching at the same summer school since then. This particular summer school didn't provide learners with course books so teachers had to devise their own materials according to a list of topics provided by the school for each level. Working at summer schools is quite enjoyable and doesn't have the same "assessment pressure" I felt as a teacher in private language schools or state schools. On the other hand, as a teacher, you are constantly working on how to make lessons as enjoyable as possible while developing learners' skills in English on a short-term basis (learners usually take 2-week courses). Creativity and variety were essential in this context in order to keep learners motivated and involved in the tasks. Learners generally choose to do an intensive summer course abroad in order to have new cultural experiences and enjoy themselves and therefore expect lessons to be fun and enjoyable rather than focused on specific learning outcomes. For this reason, in order to maintain learners interested in classroom tasks it was important to use games, films and speaking activities for instance. Long texts were often avoided because learners were not stimulated and authentic materials, such as newspapers and magazines, were used instead. These two contexts, summer schools and classes preparing for Cambridge examination, are at opposite sides of the

spectrum when it comes to learner objectives and lessons have to be constantly tailored to suit these divergent objectives.

In 2011 I moved to Holland and I started teaching at a secondary school in the bilingual department. Bilingual education in Holland is coordinated by the European Platform and is widespread because it is rather inexpensive. Students pursuing bilingual education do the IB¹ diploma programme for English in year 11 and 12. I taught two year 10 classes which meant I had to focus on developing some pre-IB skills. I was given the opportunity to do an 80-hour teacher training course in order to become more acquainted with the IB programme and its assessment criteria. There is an emphasis throughout the IB programme on oral and written communication, extensive reading and the nurturing of critical thinking. This was the first time that I was teaching an extensive reading programme that was not only compulsory but also the main focus of the syllabus. In general, these learners demonstrated exceptional reading skills in English, which most likely have something to do with the fact that they had to read three to four novels a year for English since grade seven. It is generally believed that the most critical element in developing reading skills is the amount of time devoted to reading. Paran (1997:30) claims that in order to become a good reader it is vital to read large amounts of material and that extensive reading is “crucial in this respect”.

During my teacher training year I gained particular interest in developing pre-reading activities and explored ways of motivating students to read and approach a text with enthusiasm and eagerness and since then have devoted efforts into including extensive reading whenever possible. Unfortunately, none of the state schools where I taught required learners to do supplementary reading and the idea of integrating extensive reading was not welcomed at all. One reason for this is that the syllabus at state schools focused on grammar to a great extent and for this reason the general justification to avoid extensive reading was to have enough time to focus on the curriculum. However, reading was exploited in course books and reading comprehension was part of regular assessment. The same situation applied

¹ The IB Diploma Programme provides a balanced and academically challenging education for students preparing for University. It will emphasize the development of the whole student, and encourages them to think globally. The IB Diploma will also give students an International Diploma, with the opportunity to study abroad as over 130 countries understand and accept IB as a rigorous and respected diploma. The diploma consists of the six academic areas: language A, individuals and societies, second language, experimental sciences, mathematics and computer science, the arts.

to the several private language schools - although there was an extensive reading programme it was not a requirement and once again, there was a general tendency to abandon the idea of integrating extensive reading in the syllabus because time was needed to improve learners grades in grammar. I noticed that teachers generally focused more on language development (i.e. vocabulary, grammar, syntax, etc.) than on reading development and practice. However, what some teachers do not seem to want to acknowledge is that these items can also be developed through extensive reading. Day & Bamford (1998:4) believe that the recurrent tendency to dispense with extensive reading is due to the fact that teachers' priorities are making sure learners do well in class and pass their examinations. Even though teachers may feel satisfaction when indeed this happens, Day and Bamford (1998:4) point out that satisfaction would be even greater if learners "left their classes reading and enjoying the process". Taking this into consideration, I took initiative to include extensive reading whenever it was possible because I felt that exposing students to it would develop their language skills, decoding skills, expand their range of vocabulary and hopefully encourage them to read independently for their own pleasure.

However, including extensive reading in my lessons was seldom an option – either because the syllabus was simply too long and time did not permit it or simply because the school didn't encourage its inclusion. Therefore, I started to gain particular interest in using authentic texts in the classroom and devising strategies for approaching reading in the classroom. Wallace (1992:145) defines authentic texts as "real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes". According to Nuttall (1996:177) teachers need to use "texts which establish the characteristics of true discourse" and "composed or simplified texts do not always have those qualities". The language in non-authentic texts is usually "artificial and unvaried, concentrating on something that has to be taught" (Berardo, 2006:61). Even though specifically-designed texts for teaching grammatical structures and so on are useful they may not be good for developing reading skills. Authentic materials enable learners to interact with real language and content rather than interacting with "fake" contexts. In addition, they learn what is going on in the real world around them. However, we should bear in mind that authenticity does not by itself ensure that materials will be convincing and effective. There are authentic texts that may not be effective for a number of reasons and the importance of how to

select a text will be discussed in chapter 3. Another possible problem when using authentic materials arises when using them with lower levels. Authentic texts can be difficult and frustrating at times for learners who struggle when decoding the texts. In these cases Nuttall (1996:177) suggests exploiting authentic texts by using more top-down strategies. If simplification is absolutely necessary, then teachers need to “preserve whatever in the original will appeal to the learners’ intelligence, while removing which intelligence alone cannot deal with” (1996:178).

Due to my fervent interest in authentic texts and extensive reading I have had the opportunity to focus on how to design diverse pre-reading activities. This practice has led me to research this area and ascertain exactly how much impact a well-devised pre-reading activity has on learners and whether it plays a decisive role in learners’ willingness to read a text a teacher has selected for them and, above all, whether it actually enhances their reading comprehension.

Chapter 2

2.1 Current teaching context

I am currently teaching at a state school in Holland which offers elementary as well as secondary education and has three different departments: a bilingual one, regular elementary and secondary education based on the Dutch curriculum and an international school. Students pursuing bilingual education do the IB diploma programme in year 11 and 12 for English and all of the students in the international school complete the Middle Years Programme and then do the IB diploma programme for all subjects. Although the educational programmes of the International School are independent of those at the Dutch School, a conscious decision has been made to have an international and a national school within the same building, aiming to create a unique meeting place of cultures. All students and teachers share the same facilities.

The School has a spacious campus opening on to a large sports field. In addition, there is a well-equipped auditorium, a drama studio, a tournament-size sports hall plus two other gyms, a technology centre, modern laboratories, computer rooms, an impressive media centre and an open learning centre with computer work stations for 50 students. In addition to this, each classroom is equipped with a projector and internet. I have three different roles at this school: I am an English teacher for the MYP programme in the international school, an EAL² teacher for students in the international school and a substitute teacher for all three departments. Teaching in all three departments has given me a holistic view of all the divergences regarding the syllabus, the testing system and the learners' level of English and due to this factor I came to realise that the development of reading skills diverged to some degree in each department.

In the international department extensive reading plays a significant role in the syllabus because students read three to four novels a year, depending on whether they are doing English A (higher level) or English B (standard level). Students in the Dutch bilingual

² The English as an Additional Language Programme provides intensive English language support for students for whom English is not a first language.

department read three novels a year and the syllabus focuses on developing IB skills due to the fact these students choose to do the IB programme in year 11 and 12 for English and the Dutch national secondary education programme for the remaining subjects. The Dutch department has a completely different approach to reading. Even though there is an extensive reading programme (two novels a year), the reading comprehension questions in the national examinations that students must take in English are formulated and answered in Dutch.

2.2 Aims of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate and contrast two types of pre-reading activities: pre-reading activities that pre-teach vocabulary vs pre-reading activities that focus only on pre-questioning that will lead learners to think about the theme and content without introducing new vocabulary.

The general research question was: What effects will the use of and lack of pre-reading reading activities have on reading comprehension in heterogeneous classes?

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Vocabulary pre-teaching is less effective than pre-questioning.
2. Students in both experiment groups will outperform students in the control condition.

This study was carried out in the international department of a state school in the Netherlands which has heterogeneous classes due to the fact that there can be as many as 10 different nationalities in one class and English can be either a learner's first, second or even third language. Many students have parents of different nationalities and will have studied at other international schools abroad before coming to the Netherlands. The students in the international school have diverse cultural backgrounds and all of them are doing either the IBMYP programme or IBDP programme, both of which have a completely different approach compared to the regular elementary and secondary education based on the Dutch curriculum. It is a programme focused on critical thinking in which extensive reading plays an important role. In addition to this, English is a subject taught from the L1 perspective and not as a foreign language and students can either choose higher or standard level depending on their language skills.

The question of whether or not pre-reading activities will in fact make a difference in a setting such as this one was chosen because it is in the researcher's interest to shed light on what effects pre-reading activities can have in mixed classes. The students who participated in this study have different cultural backgrounds and are taught English from an L1 perspective even though not all the students are native speakers or bilingual. There has been thorough research regarding the effects of pre-reading activities in the EFL classroom. Many researchers claim that pre-reading activities became an interest in the L2 classroom because of studies (Mayer 1984; Stevens 1982; Langer 1984) that demonstrated their effectiveness in the L1 classroom. Several studies have demonstrated how pre-reading activities can be effective in activating L2 readers' schemata and therefore enhance their understanding of the text (Hudson 1982; Taglieber, Johnson, & Yarbrough 1988; Mihara, 2011).

Stevens (1982) carried out a study involving 140 tenth grade boys in a school in Chicago in which three of the four classes were given related background content knowledge (about the Texan War) while the control group was given information about a different topic (the U.S. civil war) and concluded that providing background information on a topic improved reading comprehension of a text (in this case the text was about the Battle for the Alamo during the Texan war). In the Taglieber, Johnson & Yarbrough (1988) study, participants were provided with 3 pre-reading activities: guessing reading content from pictures, pre-teaching vocabulary and pre-reading questions. There was a control group that did not receive any of the pre-reading activities. The conclusions were that the experimental subjects outperformed the control group but the pre-teaching vocabulary activity was less effective than the pre-questioning and pictorial activities.

2.3 Background to the study: justification for action

Swaffar (1988:126) points out that several studies have confirmed the theory that familiarity with schemata “will facilitate reading comprehension” because it “enhances language recognition, concept recall, and inferential reasoning”. It is up to teachers to activate this familiarity with schemata in order to achieve a better understanding of the text because if the reader is not familiar with the text then this will result in failure to understand it (Usen, 1993). Finding ways to enhance this understanding can be a challenge and achieving this goal has been a concern for teachers who have struggled for many years to understand the “process by which people come to understand what they read” (Hammadou, 2000:38). According to Alyousef (2005:145) reading comprehension can be enhanced through expansion of vocabulary and development of complex syntactic structures. Alessi & Dwyer (2008) point out that knowing vocabulary before reading and having vocabulary knowledge that is well developed (i.e., knowing a variety of meanings, idiomatic uses, and nuances for the vocabulary words) is much better for fluent and successful reading. This is why, most textbooks nowadays, often precede a reading selection with a vocabulary list or an activity that introduces new or important vocabulary. On the other hand, Fukkink et al (2005) researched how training in second-language word recognition affected reading comprehension and concluded that there was no strong link between an increase of lexical knowledge and reading comprehension. According to their study, word recognition is only a part of the reading comprehension process because “linguistic knowledge, metacognitive skills, and strategic coordination of lower- and higher-order processes are all involved simultaneously” (Fukkink et al, 2005:72). Farrell (2009:15) claims that “reading is more than trying to decode words in a text, because we must be able to understand what all these words mean when taken together as a whole”. In addition to this, Swaffar (1988:124) claims that reading comprehension also depends on learners’ “individual perspectives and background”.

The reading process is not linear by any means and certainly not a simple process of decoding words in a text. It is a process that can require up to three different approaches: the top-down approach, the bottom-up approach and the interactive approach. In top-down processing, the reader interprets assumptions and draws conclusions based on his/her

experience and knowledge. In bottom-up processing, the reader analyses every word and recognizes letters while focusing on syntax. Nuttall (1996:16) compares top-down processing to “an eagle’s eye view of the text” where the reader considers the text as a whole and “relates it to his own knowledge and experience” and compares the bottom-up processing to “ a scientist with a magnifying glass examining the ecology of a transect – a tiny part of the landscape the eagle surveys”. According to Carrell (1984:333) top-down processing is “conceptually-driven” while bottom-up processing is “data-driven”. The interactive model on the other hand, combines both reading processes. The reader makes use of both by conscious choice, either adopting a top-down approach to predict the meaning of the text or the bottom-up approach to “check whether that is really what the writer says” (Nuttall, 1996:17). According to Farrell (2009:21) the process of comprehension is a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes. When readers try to comprehend, there is a “bouncing back-and-forth between readers and the text, between their top-down knowledge of the topic and the text”. Paran (1997) believes readers should become less dependant on top-down processing and more reliant on bottom-up processes as they become more advanced learners. Although Paran defends the usage of pre-reading activities, he defends that as L2 readers become more proficient they should rely less on context and become more capable of extracting information from the text without the help of contextualization and activation of schemata.

The participants in this study have an advanced level of English and therefore generally adopt top-down reading processes. Although it is noticeable that most of these learners can summarize a passage or explain the main ideas of a text quite easily, it can also be observed at times that they find it difficult to explain isolated expressions, phrases or words and link them to the context of the passage. Vocabulary pre-teaching is more linked to a bottom-up approach and for this reason one of the aims of this study is to ascertain whether it is an effective tool for reading comprehension.

Chapter 3 - Literature review

3.1 Introduction

Pre-reading activities have gained a prominent importance in the foreign language classroom. These activities must not only be motivating and varying but they must also precede and integrate themselves in a classroom ritual. Wallace (1992:86) calls this ritual a “three-phase framework” that is made up of activities which “precede presentation of the text, those which accompany it and those which follow it”. It is what we call pre, while and post reading activities – vital stages in any lesson construct. Wallace describes two types of activities which precede the text: those which simply consist of questions to which the reader is required to find the answer in the text and tasks focused on preparing the reader for likely linguistic difficulties in the text. Whether they are made up of questions or whether they raise awareness of necessary linguistic elements, pre-reading activities always remind readers of what they already know about the subject or topic at hand. In other words, pre-reading activities “activate existing schematic knowledge” (Wallace, 1992:86). This activation facilitates “the recall of knowledge” and helps students to “understand and associate with what is being presented to them” (Ajideh, 2006:4).

A significant amount of research has been conducted indicating that reading comprehension and reading skills are enhanced when prior knowledge is activated. Anderson (1994:179) points out that “activation of prior knowledge of the text organization can facilitate reading comprehension”. Encouraging learners to express their personal knowledge, ideas and opinions may increase motivation and confidence and activate linguistic competence related to the text. Motivation and linguistic competence should walk side by side in any pre-reading activity. The first two goals of any pre-reading activity is to motivate learners and boost their confidence – only then may they feel capable of grasping linguistic elements. Learners should feel comfortable and eager to participate in the language process in order to tackle specific language problems. In addition to this, they should receive sufficient motivation and information in order to produce and interact with the whole class. This interaction will not only make learners come to terms with new experiences but it will also

foster specific competences in the language learning situation. In short, when we design a pre-reading activity we should always bear in mind its ability to activate content schemata, to deal with linguistic features (vocabulary, language structures, grammar forms, etc.) and, above all, to motivate learners.

3.2 Reading – the roles of teachers and learners

According to Nuttall (1996:31), the basic aims of reading are: to enable learners to enjoy and feel comfortable with reading, to be capable of reading unfamiliar authentic texts at adequate speed, thus silently extracting from it an appropriate meaning. Harmer (1998:70) complements Nuttall's aims with six principles for reading, (from which I will focus on three):

- 1 – Reading is not a passive skill
- 2 – Students need to be engaged with what they are reading
- 3 – Students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a reading text, not just to the language
- 4 – Prediction is a major factor in reading
- 5 – Match the task to the topic
- 6 – Good teachers exploit reading texts to the full

First of all, reading must be envisaged as an active skill through which learners infer meaning by touching the “core” of the text. Just as Nuttall states that learners must enjoy the text, so does Harmer connect learners' engagement to what they are reading. Only if readers enjoy the text may they “respond to the content” (Harmer, 1998), to the text's ultimate message – Nuttall's opinion also. Harmer's fourth principle invokes prediction as an essential aspect in the reading process. Teachers should create expectations in learners - this will contribute in a significant way to learners' engagement. Harmer's last two principles focus on the actual text's reading and how teachers should develop it. First of all, the task needs to fit the text, this is, teachers should choose or devise effective tasks and activities. Teachers have to make tasks neither too obvious nor boring, neither too complex nor far-fetched. They

should be capable of challenging learners' intelligence without making unreasonable demands on their knowledge of English and of the world itself.

Last but not least, teachers should "exploit reading texts to the full" (Harmer, 1998:71). This requires the so-called "three-phase framework", the pre, while and post reading ritual. Teachers should articulate and juxtapose all moments of a class to the text or its topic. It is important not to tell learners to read the text just to get the gist out of it, we have to explain relevant vocabulary, grammar forms, language structures, cultural aspects and lead learners to interpret the text's message or messages. Teachers have an important role in the developing of reading in learners. We already know that teachers are not mere transmitters of knowledge; they are rather facilitators and monitors of learners' development. As such, teachers must prepare learners for certain tasks, monitor their progress and make sure they work productively thus encouraging them to promote their own autonomy. Through monitoring teachers will become aware of learners' difficulties and will be able to devise strategies so that they overcome their learning problems. However, learners should also be aware that they play an active role in their own learning process. It is they who have to develop the competences and strategies to carry out the tasks and activities. One way of assuring their development is making sure they know why they are carrying out these tasks and activities. Learners need to understand the point of what they are doing.

3.3 How to select a text

Choosing a text may not always be an easy task. The validity of its use depends on vital questions that in some cases lead us to a road with a few "stop" signs. For this reason, there are many questions teachers must ask themselves when selecting a text. For instance, before using a text we must take into account the age of the learners their interest in the topic of the text and their language proficiency. It is important that the topic of the text at hand be appealing and/or controversial in order to obtain motivation and interaction from learners. This, of course, has a lot to do with the age of the learners. However, although it is important for learners to get grips with new and interesting texts, we mustn't fall into the trap of wanting to present something so new and remote from the learners' experience that it will make the

text difficult to understand. On the other hand, an interesting text is not enough to lead us to select a text. We cannot ignore the actual “readability” (Nuttall, 1996:174) of the text. We should ask ourselves: Is the language complex? Are there difficult lexical structures or grammatical forms that need previous explanation? Is the text’s length suitable? All these questions will be answered according to the learners’ language proficiency and their knowledge of the organizational features of the text. So far I have focused on aspects that challenge learners’ receptivity and posterior familiarization with the text but what is it that learners actually gain in reading a particular text? The text should be able to expand learners’ knowledge whether this be cultural, linguistic or social. Other than that, and according to Nuttall (1996:179), the text must:

- ⇒ introduce new or relevant ideas;
- ⇒ make learners aware of how people think;
- ⇒ lead learners to want to read for themselves.

It is undeniable that the text is an essential living and breathing element in the any language learning process. Its usage can only be productive in the classroom if we are successfully capable of getting students to interact and “do things” with texts, not just by reading them but also by using them. Students must work their way through texts and progressively interact with their meaning thus “combining textual information with the information a reader brings to a text” (Widdowson in Grabe, 1988:56). Wallace (2003:23) points out that reading is no longer viewed as a process where learners extract meaning from a text but rather one where learners interact with the actual text while Carrell (1984:333) claims that “meaning understood from a text is really not *in* the text, per se, but *in* the reader, in the background or schematic knowledge of the reader”. Once learners grasp the genuine feel of a text it acts as a powerful motivator and, even more, it touches on themes to which learners can bring a personal response from their own experience.

3.4 Aims of pre-reading activities

Learners comprehend a text more easily if they have a clear idea about what kind of information they can expect to encounter. Before learners start reading any text, they need to see a “preview” of it as if they were at the movies in order to build up their expectations towards it. This preview will help them to access what they already know in terms of content and vocabulary and will help them to learn what they still do not know. Previewing makes for smoother reading and smoother reading lessons because the more learners “look forward to reading and anticipate what a text holds in store for them, the easier it will be for them to comprehend its main points” (Day, 1993:41). Grellet (1981:61) considers this stage of previewing one of “psycholinguistic sensitizing”. A good trailer will normally lead people to want to watch the movie – the same goes with pre-reading activities. An effective pre-reading activity will arouse learners’ curiosity and encourage them to delve deeper into the world of the text. Learners will be sensitized and led to think about the theme and content of the text thus facilitating its comprehension.

In the broad sense of the word, comprehension of a text implies linking new information to what we already know. Ajideh (2003:5) refers to this process as “building bridges between a student’s existing knowledge and new knowledge”. Thus, we understand texts by using our knowledge of the world, the content area, the context involved as well as our knowledge of syntax, lexicon, grammar, semantics and orthography, for example. However, if the text embodies difficulties for learners in these directions they will only be able to scratch the surface of the text’s comprehension. On the other hand, if difficult aspects of a text are explained and content schemata are activated beforehand, learners will undoubtedly go further than just scratching the surface. This is what pre-reading activities are for: to familiarise learners with the text and its linguistic elements they are to encounter thus facilitating posterior comprehension.

In the absence of a pre-reading activity the learner will still have to unravel crucial information and run into constant obstacles due to insufficient background knowledge or

lexical knowledge whereas when a pre-reading activity is introduced the learner has a smoother reading process because there has been guidance towards crucial information in the text. Even though time is gained by excluding a pre-reading activity, it will all be lost when learners repeatedly hit dead ends and continuously ask the teacher for help thus losing motivation and, above all, autonomy in the comprehension tasks. Therefore, introducing a pre-reading activity will surely ensure learners “not to stumble on every difficulty or get discouraged from the outset” (Grellet, 1981:14).

The ultimate goal of any pre-reading activity is to encourage and motivate learners to read. In order to obtain learners’ engagement and joy in reading we have to spark it up before they actually read the text. In this light, pre-reading activities are “warm-up” moments that, just as with athletes, prepare readers to jump into the text’s meaning. If readers do not exercise gently beforehand they are likely to dislocate meaning from its context just as an athlete may dislocate a muscle. Whether learners are motivated intrinsically, doing something for pleasure, interest or to challenge and develop skills and knowledge or extrinsically, doing something in order to gain a separable outcome such as getting a job, pleasing a teacher or avoiding punishment (Ryan and Deci 2000), it is essential to encourage students to read and learn from reading. If teachers provide structured feedback, earned praise, interpersonal support, “promote self-directed learning” and create a positive atmosphere in class (Readence, 2000:7), then learners can redirect their thinking in more positive ways. Learners need to be involved with what they are about to read so that once they grasp the text they will immediately feel closer to it. This involvement will therefore create a context and help establish a consequent meaning. There are two factors linked to this involvement: activation and prediction.

It is very important that learners’ knowledge be activated in a pre-reading activity. The notion that prior knowledge influences reading comprehension suggests that meaning does not rest solely on the printed word but that the reader brings certain knowledge to the reading which will, in turn, influence comprehension. In other words, as Grellet (1981:18) affirms: “What we already know about the subject and what we are looking for are probably just as important as what we actually draw from the text”. Learners’ knowledge contributes in a

significant way to the text's meaning and teachers must be aware of the importance of this thus valuing learners' knowledge to the full. Teachers must have an understanding of what learners might know about the topic or content of the text. By using this sensitivity, teachers can promote interaction in the classroom by eliciting knowledge from learners as much as possible keeping in mind that teachers should never say what a learner could say for her/himself. Teachers must challenge learners' knowledge and beliefs about the content of the passage with a series of questions, some being "provocative" in nature. However, in some cases, some readers may not have prior knowledge to activate. In such cases, we cannot expect learners to say something which they do not know and for this reason we must establish a context and provide background information prior to asking learners to read so that they have sufficient information to understand the text.

By activating their schemata we lead learners to another essential aspect of pre-reading activities: prediction. Just as Nuttall (1996:13) explains, prediction invokes learners' personal experiences thus establishing associations they have about the topic of the text. Later on, Nuttall (1996:15) calls this ritual a "psycholinguistic guessing game". If readers make predictions about what they think the text content will be, they can read to support or reject their hypotheses. Thus, it is a game because when reading we keep making predictions which, in turn, will be confirmed or corrected. It has been made clear that while activating schemata and stimulating predictions, learners may be able to tackle beforehand aspects of the text that are likely to cause them problems. This leads us into another specific aim of pre-reading activities: pre-teaching or recalling vocabulary. As previously mentioned, before selecting a text we must think of the lexical items that need to be explained beforehand. Teachers need to decide which words learners need to know and how these words can be introduced in the pre-reading moment. Ajideh (2006:3) believes that learners "are more likely to experience success if they are familiar with selected vocabulary items before they begin reading".

However, we must always bear in mind that we can never exploit all the relevant vocabulary of a text – this will only lead to a memory load. There is no use in introducing a long list of words – a few lexical items are sufficient to cause a posterior familiarisation with the text. Farrell (2009: 69) recommends that teachers introduce "five to seven words at a

time”. Kueker (1990:9) claims that the number of new lexical items should be “limited to five to ten words”. On the other hand we can’t spend too much time in explaining those five to ten words – over-explanation will lend itself to saturation. Other than this, it is important to remember that a pre-reading activity doesn’t necessarily focus on words that appear in the text. It can also acquaint learners with words related to the topic of the text in the way that a brainstorming activity does. What must be taken into account is the fact that teachers have to introduce vocabulary in terms of content: only after confronting the text can we explain other meanings a word may have. If teachers want learners to learn vocabulary they must dwell on those words in post-reading activities. This is a vital distinction which Aebersold & Field (1997:139) makes: introducing vocabulary as opposed to learning vocabulary. While pre-reading activities focus on introducing words, post-reading activities emphasize their learning. On the other hand, while-reading activities concentrate on comprehension, which is facilitated by creating a “content-to-vocabulary approach” (1997:140). Aebersold & Field (1997:139) point out that learners “need to see a word as many times in different contexts before it is learned”. Teachers should not expect lexical acquisition from pre-reading activities – learning new words requires a number of different activities. Trayer (1990:831) claims that “reinforcement of important words is critical by placing them in different contexts to give them added exposure”.

Even though teachers should introduce vocabulary in a pre-reading activity whenever possible, it is important to realize that learners need to find out the meaning of vocabulary by themselves according to the context of the text. Farrell (2009:70) points out that the aim of pre-teaching vocabulary is to make learners become more independent and instead of giving up when they see an unfamiliar word they “can make an intelligent guess as to its meaning”. By using this reading strategy learners can gain autonomy and develop their predictive skills by guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words thus not expecting teachers to constantly give them all the answers. This goes for every other pre-reading strategy. Teachers should do their best to arouse curiosity in learners thus giving them a reason for reading the text. If a teacher gives away all the vital information and ‘solves’ the whole text for learners, they will have nothing else to discover and the element of challenge will disappear.

Learners should be able to generate new ideas on their own reading of the text which they can then share and solidify with other learners and the teacher (Aebersold & Field, 1997:70). Only then will they become aware of the world, of how people think and, above all, they will expand their knowledge. This leads us to yet another aim of pre-reading activities: establishing a purpose for reading. It is important for learners to be aware that teachers give them a text not solely so that they learn vocabulary or simply because they have to complete a task. Learners should be led to wanting to find out the many answers in the text the teacher may have alluded to. In this way they will regard the text as something that gives them pleasure and will want to read it not because the teacher told them to but because they actually want to.

3.5 Examples of pre-reading activities

Young (1991:1126) points out that pre-reading activities address “cognitive, linguistic and affective goals”. Learners share ideas and experiences, think critically about a topic to be read and come across new vocabulary and structures to be found in the text. I have divided my examples of pre-reading activities into six sections: visuals, titles and phrases, songs and dialogues, stories, text-based tasks and games. Rather than dividing the list into the type of cognitive, linguistic or affective skill it addresses (such as predicting, previewing, vocabulary pre-teaching and so on) the list is divided into types of materials used which allows for easier access. I will comment on the skills I think each activity exploits the most. However, this does not mean that when I mention that a given activity is appropriate for pre-teaching vocabulary or activation of prior knowledge and so on that it excludes all the other aims I mentioned previously.

Visuals

I have included pictures, videos, objects, brainstorming and the use of acrostics in this section because their impact is predominantly visual in the activity designed for them. The first material – pictures – is in recurrent use in classrooms nowadays. Things learners see play an enormous part in their affective and linguistic engagement in learning activities. We must

never forget that we predict, deduce and infer, not only from what we read but also from what we see around us. The key to using pictures is selecting interesting ones which entail meaning and authenticity and a sufficient amount of language (Wright, 1989:3). Learners are usually motivated by the use of pictures and Wright (1989) points out that almost any picture can be adapted to suit any level of proficiency. A good example of this adaptability is the speaking paper in Cambridge exams in which pictures are used differently according to the level of the examination.

The most simple and recurrent activity with pictures involves asking learners what they see in the picture or pictures and describing it or them. It is an activity which mostly focuses on creating a context and exploiting vocabulary by recollection or introduction. Prediction can appear when we ask learners to imagine what could be beyond the picture or what they would add to the picture, and so on. A good way of stimulating prediction is covering some parts of the picture and asking learners what they expect to encounter. Another way of achieving this would be to show the picture out of focus and ask learners what they expect to see or yet again show a black and white picture and ask them what colours they would paint it. An activity that also prompts prediction involves learners imagining a story through one or more pictures. It is also possible to use several titles around a picture and ask learners what title they think fits the picture. One thing that should be taken into consideration when carrying out these predictive activities is to let learners formulate as many hypotheses as they can by accepting all their answers as a possibility. This will lead to Nuttall's "psycholinguistic guessing game" (1996:15) once their expectations are confirmed or rejected later on. When I use pictures I use them mainly to arouse prediction but above all, to exploit vocabulary because lexical association is facilitated with the aid of visuals. Other than this, when devising these activities and their strategies we must never forget to link the pictures to the text.

Another interesting pictorial vehicle is the use of realia. Yopp (2010:44) points out that the use of realia supports learners' efforts to learn new content because it provides "something tangible to support their meaning making". I have used objects in my classroom with strategies involving guessing and speculating. For example, when I exploited a text about

mobile phones I told learners that we were going to talk about something that was related to what I had in my bag. I went on by giving them clues, such as “It is not very big”, “I use it every day”, “You probably have one too” until they guessed what it was. After that I took it out of my bag and asked them to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of its usage. This was a very objective way of using an item from the real world but it could also be used in a subjective way such as asking learners what they would do with the given object, or where it comes from (which in my case wasn’t possible it being so obvious).

Video sequences are always a motivation factor in the classroom. Learners find it to be highly enjoyable and a lot can be said through image sequences. Learners can, for example, imagine dialogues and feelings or predict what comes next in the sequence. It is another way of leading learners to guess the context of the lesson. Commercials are, for instance, a good way of introducing the topic of advertising or travel.

One of the simplest activities that requires no material and causes visual impact is, of course, brainstorming. It causes this impact because once the whiteboard becomes full of words with contextual meaning, learners are able to make associations and generate new ideas by sharing words that may be hanging loosely on the whiteboard but are unified in a context. According to Usen (1993:19), brainstorming “enables teachers to help students make connections between the new and the known to form new ideas”. A perfect way of brainstorming is using the website www.wordle.net (if the classroom is equipped with a projector and the internet). The following “wordle” is an example of a brainstorming activity on the topic of how evolution has affected the world in a negative way (as a pre-listening activity to the song “Do the evolution” by Pearl Jam).



An alternative to the traditional brainstorming activity is the use of semantic maps, which are graphic displays of information organized into categories. Yopp (2010:38) claims that semantic maps “result in better story recall in low-achieving readers” because they help students “integrate new information and restructure existing networks”.

Titles and phrases_____

A suggestive title is a very compelling way of starting a pre-reading activity. We can simply ask learners to comment on the title of a text and predict its content or we could use it in more “playful” ways of learning, as Hess calls it (1991:26). One of her activities with titles involves the jumbling of the words of the title of the text. She suggests a long and mysterious title provided for each learner on a card. A variation of this technique would be to write the title on the whiteboard and ask learners to reorder it together thus promoting a more collective and shared interaction. Another good way of exploring titles is using an incomplete one and asking learners to predict its ending. Also, as I mentioned in visuals, we could surround a picture with various titles (at least five) and ask learners to suggest the one they feel fits the picture the best.

These “playful” activities distinguish themselves from the first activity (generated discussion of a title) because they focus much more on creating a context rather than exploiting lexical items. When I ask my learners to comment on a title it gives me more room to exploit vocabulary because it is a much more “teacher-directed” strategy. The “playful” activities are much more “student-directed” because, in a way, learners conduct the lesson according to their own predictions. Ajideh (2006) point out these activities are “student-centered because they make use of the students’ prior knowledge and the students have control over the process of learning”. When commenting on a title there should be a focus on one element that is solid information from which predictions spring in contrast to other activities where various elements invoke several predictions which are all commanded by the learner. Yopp (2010: 42) points out that previewing “promotes engagement in strategic reading” as students generate questions about the text and establish “ a purpose for reading”. Usen (1993:13) claims that these type of pre-reading questioning activities stir curiosity and

about what learners are about to read and lead them “to anticipate and focus attention on important information”.

Phrases can also be used to generate discussion, anticipation and prediction. Phrases can be a quotation, a proverb, a statement, etc. or simply a phrase from the text. Yopp (2010:27) suggests an activity called “book bits” where students are given sentences or phrases from the text or book to be read in order to “arouse curiosity and stimulate thinking about the text”. Another activity Yopp (2010:18) suggests is giving learners a list of statements with which they are asked to agree or disagree called anticipation guides. Yopp claims this activity will prime learners for “making personal connections with the text” and spark “their interest as they consider their own opinions and those of their classmates”. Usen (1993:14) points out that this type of activity will help learners “clarify their thinking” and help teachers understand what depth of knowledge they have about the topic of the text. An alternative means of eliciting prediction of the content of a text is to crumple the text into a ball, throw it to each student and have students guess what the text is about with the only visible vocabulary to them. The teacher can determine what other pieces of the puzzle should be revealed so that students can do some scanning to find answers and to check their guesses about the content of the text.

Songs and dialogues_____

Using songs in order to introduce a topic can be a highly motivational tool. We can play a song with or without lyrics for learners to listen to – if the song has lyrics it depends on learners’ listening skills and the perceptibility of the song’s lyrics. *The three R’s* by Jack Johnson is a good song to introduce the topic of recycling to young learners for instance. Murphy (1992:7) points out that songs generally use “simple, conversational language, with a lot of repetition, which is what many language teachers look for in sample texts”. Using a song as a pre-reading activity can be a highly motivating activity which can provide fun and “encourage harmony” in a classroom (Murphy, 1992:8).

Dialogues, on the other hand, are a simple way of introducing a text when we have no time for preparing materials. We can turn a dialogue into a very stimulating and interactive

activity – this of course depends on the theme, the teacher’s expressiveness and understanding of learners’ knowledge. A dialogue can be a story with guessing cues or simply a “teacher-directed” discussion about the topic learners are about to deal with. A pleasant way of commencing a lesson is with an interesting story where learners are asked to imagine sequences. Cues such as, “Guess what happened to me today?” or “What do you think happened next?” are questions that lend themselves to an arousing curiosity in learners, especially when the story is true and actually happened to the teacher. Ur and Wright (1992:7) suggest a chain story as an interesting way to start a lesson. The teacher begins to tell a story and each learner has to add another “brief” installment to the story.

Stories_____

Just as I mentioned earlier, we can use a story that stimulates learners’ guesses but we can also simply narrate a story that happened to us without asking for predictions. Once again, if the story is about a personal experience directly or indirectly related to the teacher’s life it is more likely that the learners’ curiosity is aroused. A story can also be the actual text partly read by the teacher. The teacher can read the beginning of the text and learners imagine the rest of the story. This activity cannot be used with any sort of text because it must sound like a sort of “once upon a time” story if it is to obtain successful results. This is an interesting activity because the teacher can write learners’ predictions on one half of the board, then learners read the text to find out what actually happened. Afterwards, learners compare their predictions to what actually happened – all of which are written on the whiteboard. I have focused on stories told by the teacher but even more interesting are learners’ own stories. We can ask learners to imagine a story by giving them key words from the text or by showing them the beginning of the text so they can imagine the rest of it. Unfortunately, the only problem is that sometimes this may take up a little bit more time than other pre-reading activities because most learners want to write down their stories which inevitably increases the time required and the degree of difficulty of the activity.

Text-based tasks _____

When I speak of text-based tasks, I am referring to activities which are much more “content-directed”. Specific information regarding the text is revealed and learners must predict accordingly. Amongst the many activities we may use, for example, is a matching exercise. This exercise can either match sentences related to the events of the text or vocabulary that will show up in the text. I personally prefer the second activity because sometimes the first one may reveal too much vital information and refer to minor events in the text that do not hold much importance for a global understanding. It is also possible to use a true/false or a multiple choice exercise but once again we have to be careful not to reveal too much relevant information that will eliminate the actual purpose of reading and irrelevant information that does not contribute to a global understanding of the text.

Another idea is to use a summary of the text with gaps for learners to fill in with an appropriate word of their choice. The summary should never exceed a paragraph nor should the gaps be excessive. It is important to tell learners they will imagine a word and that they will be told the real word whilst correcting the exercise, however this doesn’t mean their word is wrong. This is an excellent activity for introducing vocabulary, once again learners become compelled to share hypotheses and find out the real word. Williams (1987) suggests another interesting way of introducing the topic of a text. Once the topic is presented, students work in groups and make two lists: one must contain things they know about the topic while the other must contain things they are not sure of or don’t know. Young (1991:1126) points out that this type of activity has cognitive goals because it leads students to “think analytically about what they know about a given topic”.

Games _____

Games are also a very “playful” way of approaching a text. I recently I came upon an interesting student-directed crossword by Ur and Wright (1992:12-13). Their activity focuses on exploring vocabulary without the support of any text, the teacher asks a learner to write a word in a grid of 100 squares and afterwards learners think of words while given clues by the

teacher. As a pre-reading activity, I usually use this activity by adopting a teacher-directed strategy in order to exploit words linked to the text. The teacher chooses the first word and leads learners to think of other words related to the topic of the text. We can also use games such as trivial pursuit or noughts and crosses, for example, using questions regarding the topic of the text.

Whether a pre-reading activity focuses more on lexical items or activation or building of background knowledge, it is an important stage in the lesson in order to prepare learners for the text. It is an important stage because it allows learners to share their thoughts about a topic, make predictions, or become familiar with new words that are key words representing major concepts in a text. They can set the right tone, get learners to focus, motivate learners to read and consequently enhance their understanding of the text. The list of pre-reading activities I have presented is far from being a completed one; it is a list I intend to expand on a continuous basis throughout my teaching experience. It is important to vary pre-reading activities – if learners are faced with the same pre-reading activity every lesson it becomes more strenuous to engage them in the activity. There are endless ways of introducing new vocabulary, activating background knowledge or getting learners to make predictions and it is up to teachers to do so creatively.

Chapter 4

4.1 Methodology

The subjects for the study were 45 students studying at an international school in the Netherlands in grade 8. There were two grade 8 groups, one consisting of 23 students (10 males and 13 females), and the other of 22 students (10 males and 12 females). The level of English of the students is equivalent to C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. A profile of the students' nationalities is shown below.

Nationalities		
	Dutch	18
	American	4
	British	4
	German	3
	Italian	2
	Indian	2
	Finnish	2
	Icelandic	1
	Latvian	1
	Polish	1
	Ethiopian	1
	French	1
	Colombian	1
	Danish	1
	Romanian	1
	Irish	1
	Belgian	1

Figure 1 Information about students' nationalities

Two methods of intervention which allowed for two types of schemata activation were designed: pre-questioning and pre-teaching vocabulary. The pre-reading activity was designed to activate students' background knowledge and speculate about certain passages of the text while the pre-teaching vocabulary activity was designed to provide vocabulary items which might be unknown but were essential for comprehension of certain passages of the text.

4.2 Procedure

Participants were given pre-reading activities and the reading comprehension test in their regular English lesson with their regular English teacher. In total there were two classes and two different teachers, one of which was the researcher of this study. The pre-reading activities were explained thoroughly to the other teacher taking care not to include information that would appear later in the reading comprehension questions. Passages were selected from the current syllabus and key words or phrases were then selected as representing major concepts in each passage. One group of students received the pre-teaching vocabulary activity and a second group received a pre-questioning activity, while a third group was considered the control group and received no pre-reading activity. Due to the fact that there were only two classes, six students from each class were asked to leave the classroom during the pre-reading activities in order to create a control group.

Each lesson started with a pre-reading activity which lasted approximately 10 minutes and was carried out immediately before the reading task. After the pre-reading activity all participants read independently without advice or help from the teacher and then proceeded with a reading comprehension test which included explicit and implicit (inferential) items. There was no time limit for reading the text or doing the test because the researcher did not consider reading speed a factor in determining the effects of pre-reading activities in this study. The passage chosen was a short story entitled "An Astrologer's Day" by R.K. Narayan. This passage was chosen from the syllabus in order to test students on material they are familiar with and used to dealing with in class. The pre-reading activities used in this study consisted of using an activity entitled "Book Bits", designed by Yopp & Yopp (2010). Four important passages from the text were chosen either to exploit lexical items or pre-question

students about content of the text. Both pre-reading activities were used to stimulate the learners' schemata in order for them to link their own background knowledge to the new information coming from the text in order to lead to a better reception of the information and improve reading comprehension. In the pre-questioning activity students were asked to read out a "book bit" (in total there were four) and the class discussed the content and made predictions and speculations. It was mostly teacher-directed in order for students to make connections with important representations they would encounter later on in the short story. In the vocabulary pre-teaching activity students were also asked to read a "book bit" (different to the ones chosen for the pre-questioning activity) and ten lexical items were explained (by use of synonyms or sentences) to students. The words were selected on the basis of their importance to understanding certain passages and the likelihood that they were unknown to the students. All lexical items were written on the whiteboard with their definition or synonym but became unavailable to students once they started reading the short story. The words were defined and explained in context and not with other unrelated sentences.

After the pre-reading activities were completed the six students who were randomly selected from each class to leave the classroom were called back in to read the short story and do the test with the rest of the class. The test comprised eight open-ended questions and eight multiple-choice questions which were designed by the researcher. The test was checked through beforehand with two expert colleagues from the International Department and, as a result, a few questions were modified. Aebersold and Field (1997) claim that multiple-choice tests are the most familiar type of test used to check reading comprehension. One of the reasons for choosing this type of test is because the scoring is reliable and objective. However, according to Farrell (2009:92) one of the disadvantages of using this type of test is that it can promote guessing and this can affect the score. Therefore, a decision was made to include two different types of reading comprehension questions.

Chapter 5

5.1 Findings and analysis of data

The hypotheses tested were that subjects receiving the vocabulary pre-teaching treatment would attain lower scores than the group receiving the pre-questioning treatment and that both groups receiving the pre-reading activities would outperform the control condition. To test the hypotheses, I analyzed the data statistically by means of a one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) and Tukey's HSD post-hoc test. The reason for choosing this statistical procedure is because there were three groups involved and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to see if there is any difference between more than two groups of a single independent variable. Post hoc tests are designed for situations in which the researcher has already obtained statistical significance with a factor that consists of three or more means and additional exploration of the differences among means is needed to provide specific information on which means are significantly different from each other. Therefore, Tukey's HSD post-hoc test was performed to determine the differences between the group receiving the pre-questioning activity, the group receiving the vocabulary pre-teaching activity and the control condition. Three results were analysed: the scores on the open-ended items, the scores on the multiple-choice items and the sum of the scores on both the open-ended items and the multiple-choice items.

Table 1 shows considerable differences between the two groups that received the pre-reading activities and the control condition. From the mean scores, it can be seen that the average score for pre-questioning ($M = 62.88$) and vocabulary pre-teaching ($M = 65.23$) were considerably higher than the control condition ($M = 47.39$). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the difference was statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 2). Considering Table 1 and Table 2, it can be concluded that the students performed significantly better in the reading comprehension test after they had been given the two pre-reading activities (pre-questioning and vocabulary pre-teaching). Differences between means were subsequently analysed with Tukey's HSD test at the .05 level of significance. Tukey's test (Table 3) indicated that the group receiving the vocabulary pre-teaching treatment

outperformed the control condition with a considerable effect size ($p=0.030$). However, no significant differences were found among the pre-reading treatments or between the pre-questioning treatment and the control condition.

Table 1 – Mean scores for treatment (all scores combined)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
PQ	17	62.8824	14.53528	3.52532	31.50	87.50
VOC	16	65.2344	13.10390	3.27598	37.50	87.50
CONTROL	12	47.3917	25.48716	7.35751	12.50	81.25
Total	45	59.5878	18.81805	2.80523	12.50	87.50

PQ – pre-questioning

VOC – vocabulary pre-teaching

Table 2 – Table of Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2479.608	2	1239.804	3.974	.026
Within Groups	13101.622	42	311.943		
Total	15581.231	44			

Table 3 – Results of the post-hoc Tukey’s HSD test on group differences

(I) Class	(J) Class	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
PQ	VOC	-2.35202	6.15192	.923
VOC	CONTROL	17.84271*	6.74476	.030
CONTROL	PQ	-15.49069	6.65920	.063

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

When analyzing the scores on the multiple-choice items it can be seen on Table 4 that the average of the group receiving pre-questioning treatment ($M = 58.82$) and vocabulary pre-teaching ($M = 63.28$) were also considerably higher than the control group ($M = 44.79$). An

analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the difference was statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 5). Differences between means were again analysed with Tukey's HSD test at the .05 level of significance. Table 6 indicates that the group receiving the vocabulary pre-teaching treatment outperformed the control group with a considerable effect size ($p=0.034$). Again, no significant differences were found among the pre-reading treatments or between the pre-questioning treatment and the control condition.

Table 4 – Mean scores for multiple-choice items

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
PQ	17	58.8235	16.39640	3.97671	25.00	87.50
VOC	16	63.2813	18.52293	4.63073	25.00	87.50
CONTROL	12	44.7917	21.62328	6.24210	12.50	75.00
Total	45	56.6667	19.69223	2.93554	12.50	87.50

Table 5 – Table of Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2471.316	2	1235.658	3.557	.037
Within Groups	14591.184	42	347.409		
Total	17062.500	44			

Table 6 – Results of the post-hoc Tukey's HSD test on group differences for multiple-choice items

(I) Class	(J) Class	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
PQ	VOC	-4.45772	6.49222	.773
VOC	CONTROL	18.48958*	7.11785	.034
CONTROL	PQ	-14.03186	7.02756	.126

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Unlike the results presented above for the total results and the multiple-choice items,

the ANOVA indicated no statistical significance for the open-ended items and it can be seen on Table 8 that none of the interactions is considered significant ($p=0.271$) and therefore a post-hoc test was not necessary. However, from the mean scores shown in Table 7 it can be seen that the means of the group receiving pre-questioning treatment ($M = 61.76$) and vocabulary pre-teaching ($M = 63.28$) were, once again, considerably higher than the control condition ($M = 48.95$) on open-ended items. Also, when comparing the results from the multiple-choice items and the open-ended items, it can be seen that the group receiving the pre-questioning treatment and the control condition performed better on the open-ended items than on the multiple-choice items. The group receiving the vocabulary pre-teaching treatment did equally well on both items.

Table 7 – Mean scores for open-ended items

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
PQ	17	61.7647	22.30409	5.40954	25.00	100.00
VOC	16	63.2813	18.52293	4.63073	12.50	87.50
CONTROL	12	48.9583	33.48097	9.66512	.00	100.00
Total	45	58.8889	24.80352	3.69749	.00	100.00

Table 8 – Table of Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1632.672	2	816.336	1.348	.271
Within Groups	25436.772	42	605.637		
Total	27069.444	44			

Chapter 6

6.1 Discussion

The present study investigated the effects of two types of pre-reading activities on the learners' reading comprehension ability and the lack of a pre-reading activity by means of a control condition. The two pre-reading activities carried out were pre-questioning and vocabulary pre-teaching. The results indicate that both activities were equally effective in facilitating learners' reading comprehension and significant differences were visible when comparing the results of pre-reading activities to the control condition. Therefore, one possible conclusion from this study is that pre-teaching vocabulary still plays a vital role even with advanced learners such as the ones who participated in this study because it was just as effective as the pre-questioning activity. Carrell (1984:335) points out that teaching new vocabulary is only effective if it is "integrated with both the student's preexisting knowledge and other pre-reading activities designed to build background knowledge". In addition to this, Carrell (1988:244) believes that vocabulary and schemata should be developed by "preteaching vocabulary and background knowledge concurrently". It is possible that if one group received vocabulary pre-teaching and pre-questioning simultaneously, more significant results might emerge. Further research will be needed to clarify this point.

As mentioned previously, the participants chosen for this study have very diverse backgrounds and also different levels of proficiency in English. Learner variables always play a prominent role in any study but in this study those variables are clearly more distinctive. Learner variables include prior knowledge, language and cultural background, rate of learning and attitudes. Some students took as little as 10 minutes to complete the reading test whereas others took as long as 30 minutes. Question seven on the open-ended test ("The astrologer ran from his village because...") was answered by seven students that it was because the astrologer did not want to become a farmer just like his father. There is no reference to this in the text which can imply that maybe prior knowledge of similar stories read at school caused this outcome. It was also observed that two lexical items on the multiple-choice test – *conjecture* and *wit* – were new to the majority of the participants in all treatment groups. The

two questions on the multiple-choice test involving these two lexical items had very low scores in all treatment groups. This could suggest that inferential reading comprehension using bottom-up processing is less successful with these participants than using top-down processing to answer items related to global understanding of the passage.

Regarding the actual reading of the text, both teachers carrying out the experiment observed that the reading speed amongst students was surprisingly different. More fluent readers took approximately 10 minutes to read the text while other students took as long as 30 minutes. Slow reading is generally associated with poor comprehension. Rasinski (2000:147) points out that research has shown that faster readers “tend to have better comprehension over what is read and tend to be, overall, more proficient readers”. On the other hand, faster readers may not fully comprehend or recall what they actually read. In his study, Bell (2001) points out that reading too fast can reduce actual comprehension. Although his study did not reveal clear results regarding this matter, it did indicate that extensive reading may increase reading speed and reading comprehension. Although reading speed was not a factor in this study, it is certainly a factor to be taken into consideration in future research.

It is also important to discuss students’ reaction to the pre-reading activities. It was clearly noticed by both teachers that students enjoyed the pre-reading activities and participated enthusiastically. The students who participated in this study are more used to having a discussion at the beginning of their lessons rather than a pre-reading activity. The type of pre-reading activities in this international school, when adopted, generally consist of pre-questioning activities which involve predicting or previewing. Vocabulary pre-teaching activities are generally not used. Due to the fact that the syllabus is highly focused on extensive reading, the first stage of a typical lesson of English (higher or standard) is to discuss what learners thought about the chapters or short story they read for homework. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)³ is not usually adopted in classes in the international department.

³ Silent Sustained Reading is a time set aside in the classroom for students to read on their own. Research has suggested that SSR is valuable in helping students progress in reading and in helping second language students acquire language proficiency.

In this study, the group receiving vocabulary pre-teaching slightly outperformed the group receiving pre-questioning treatment on open-ended items and was more effective than the pre-questioning group on the multiple-choice items by a mean difference of 4.45772. In the Hudson (1982) study, vocabulary pre-teaching involved learners writing predictions with the words pre-taught thus relating those words to the text. Results indicated that this activity was less effective than pre-questioning for beginning and intermediate levels and equally effective for advanced levels. In the Mihara (2011) study involving Japanese learners, the same applied. In the Taglieber, Johnson, & Yarbrough (1988) study, vocabulary pre-teaching was less effective than the other two pre-reading activities – pre-questioning and pictorial context - in all instances. However, the pre-taught words were not related to the content of the reading selections. On the other hand, Anderson and Freebody (as cited in Mihara, 2011:54) have pointed out that one of the most consistent findings in L1 reading research has been the high correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension.

This study revealed similar results to other studies that research the effects of pre-reading activities: students given a pre-reading activity demonstrate better reading comprehension than students who are given no lead-in to the text whatsoever. The fact that the results were clear even when dealing with heterogeneous groups supports the idea that pre-reading activities are valid in both L1 and L2 contexts.

Conclusion

Providing a good introduction of a text can ultimately turn a lesson into a successful one. The absence of an introduction will lead to unprepared learners but an incorrect introduction is no better. According to Nuttall (1996:157), pre-reading activities should never be a monologue by the teacher with no student involvement, they should never be too long and should never give away too much about the content of the text because if “everything is explicit, the students cannot develop their capacity to infer” (Nuttall, 1996:178). Titone (cited in Richards, 1994:102) puts it yet in another way: never make a speech - ask questions and never speak too much - make learners speak much more. When learners make predictions about the content of a text, they discuss what they know or want to know about a topic, reflect on and share their own experiences, they are reviewing language and expanding their knowledge (Swaffar, 1988:140). Chamot (2009) points out the importance of teaching learning strategies such as using background knowledge, using context to figure out meaning, relating new concepts to personal experiences and beliefs, making associations and logical guesses about what is to happen. According to Chamot (2009), these learning strategies will help learners become more autonomous because they will begin to understand their own learning processes and subsequently control them which will in turn lead them to become more confident, motivated and successful learners. This study revealed that these learning strategies were effective and facilitated the participants’ reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension can be enhanced with a variety of strategies and pre-reading activities are, of course, just one part of the whole picture. Hammadou (2000:47) points out that teachers cannot expect improvement in reading comprehension solely through activating schemata through pre-questioning for instance because this strategy is not enough to promote independent readers. There are of course limitations to pre-reading activities: they are not enough to foster deep understanding of a text. In addition, some teachers may argue that pre-reading activities take up too much time of a lesson. Also, it cannot be expected that vocabulary pre-teaching is sufficient for learners to acquire and assimilate new vocabulary. New words have to be introduced, then read in context and then practiced by learners. According to Wesche (2000:197) vocabulary acquisition through “reading, word knowledge

appears to be elaborated through multiple exposures to words in varied discourse contexts”. Wesche (2000:197) points out that lexical acquisition “implies the need for repeated and diverse mental processing”. For this reason, the words chosen for the pre-teaching vocabulary activity should also be used in a post-reading activity and then possibly as a homework assignment in order to become fully assimilated by the learner.

Also, as it has been mentioned earlier, different pre-reading activities have different aims depending on what the teacher wishes to exploit. For instance, when introducing the text used in this study (“An Astrologer’s Day”) it would make no sense at all to have a pre-reading activity about the art of fortune-telling because that would not improve learners’ understanding of the astrologer and his life story. I am not implying that every pre-reading activity should have the aim of improving learners’ understanding of difficult concepts or lexical items but I am implying that teachers should think carefully about what needs be exploited in the pre-reading activity and why because all phases of a class have to have an objective. According to Carrell (1984:334), pre-reading activities are more effective when they are used in varying combinations. For this reason, teachers should always work on using a wide range of pre-reading activities that lead to different types of comprehension. Variety is a crucial element when using pre-reading activities. If learners are asked the same type of questions or have the same type of lead-in activity before reading a text they can very easily become uninterested in this phase of the lesson because they already know what to expect. It is important to challenge learners’ knowledge and surprise them with new activities or approaches to reading a text. In this study, it was observed that learners enjoyed the pre-reading activities showing interest, curiosity and enthusiasm most likely due to the fact that they had never done an activity such as “book bits”.

It is important to point out that this study did not intend to discredit other pre-reading activities such as pictorial context. An obvious limitation to this study was only having two classes available and having to divide them into three groups in order to obtain a control condition. Having more participants could have given clearer results and also given the possibility to carry out a pre-reading activity using visuals. Due to the many learner variables involved and the limited number of participants, the conclusions to be drawn should be

considered limited in scope. In common with other studies (Hudson 1982; Taglieber, Johnson, & Yarbrough 1988; Mihara, 2011), vocabulary pre-teaching is just as effective as another pre-reading activity at advanced levels. A procedure to be explored in the future would be to use a vocabulary pre-teaching activity coupled with a pre-questioning one. Even though it would mean carrying out a longer pre-reading activity, it could possibly show more significant differences. Also, due to the fact that students doing an IB programme are encouraged to think critically and develop analytical reading comprehension, it would be very interesting to design pre-reading activities more focused on building background knowledge and alluding to implicit elements of a text more associated to bottom-up processing. This is a topic to be explored in the future.

While carrying out the experiment with the two types of pre-reading activities, it was possible to observe that the students in this particular context are not used to these type of pre-reading activities in which specific passages of the text to be read are exploited beforehand and vocabulary is introduced. In my opinion, even though extensive reading plays a prominent role in the syllabus and learners are quite proficient readers, vocabulary should not be overlooked. Developing lexical acquisition should be encouraged continuously and learners should be exposed to different lead-in stages of a lesson other than collective discussions. A recommendation for the future is to put into practice different types of pre-reading activities, including vocabulary pre-teaching, with the aim of improving learners' comprehension of implicit items to be discussed in the post-reading activities in order to further develop learners' analytical understanding of text.

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Appendix

Book bits – An Astrologer’s Day (Pre-questioning)

1

Punctually at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing.

2

It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night.

3

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money, and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception.

4

This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for; even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a forbidding exterior.

1 – What sort of person could this be? Why does he need this type of equipment? What profession do you think he has?

2 – What kind of place do you think it is? Could it be a city? A village? And why are there so many people?

3 – What does this mean to “have a working analysis of mankind’s troubles”? Why would he need this?

4 – Why do you think this person managed to attract people? Why is he/she endeared to people’s hearts?

Book bits – An Astrologer’s Day (Vocabulary pre-teaching)

1

His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted.

2

Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnut, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it Bombay Ice-Cream one day, and on the next Delhi Almond, and on the third Raja's Delicacy, and so on and so forth, and people flocked to him.

3

Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice, and shrewd guesswork.

4

He picked up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out; he looked up and saw a man standing before him.

Vocabulary to be introduced

1 – resplendent
vermilion
gleam

3 – shrewd
guesswork

2 – vociferousness
flock to

4 – paraphernalia
shaft of light
blotted out

AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

By R.K. Narayan

PUNCTUALLY at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks: even a half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks. He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways: a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night* A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way : medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, and, above all, an auctioneer of cheap doth, who created enough din all day to attract the whole town. Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnut, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it " Bombay Ice-Cream " one day, and on the next " Delhi Almond," and on the third " Raja's Delicacy," and so on and so forth, and people flocked to him. A considerable portion of this crowd dallied before the astrologer too. The astrologer transacted his business by the light of a flare which crackled and smoked up above the groundnut heap nearby. Half the enchantment of the place was due to the fact that it did not have the benefit of municipal lighting. The place was lit up by shop lights. One or two had hissing gaslights, some had naked flares stuck on poles, some were lit up by old cycle lamps, and one or two, like the astrologer's, managed without lights of their own. It was a bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows. This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life ; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself next minute. He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice, and shrewd guesswork. All the same, it was as much an honest man's labour as any other, and he deserved the wages he carried home at the end of a day.

He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. If he had continued there he would have carried on the work of his forefathers namely, tilling the land, living, marrying, and ripening in his cornfield and ancestral home. But that was not to be. He had to leave home without telling anyone, and he could not rest till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles. To a villager it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between.

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money, and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He charged three pies per question, never opened his mouth till the other

had spoken for at least ten minutes, which provided him enough stuff for a dozen answers and advices. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, " In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts," nine out of ten were disposed to agree with him. Or he questioned: " Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative, who is not well disposed towards you? " Or he gave an analysis of character: " Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an impetuous nature and a rough exterior." This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for; even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a forbidding exterior.

The nuts vendor blew out his flare and rose to go home. This was a signal for the astrologer to bundle up too, since it left him in darkness except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground before him. He picked up his cownie shells and paraphernalia and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out; he looked up and saw a man standing before him. He sensed a possible client and said: " You look so careworn. It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me." The other grumbled some reply vaguely. The astrologer pressed his invitation; whereupon the other thrust his palm under his nose, saying: " You call yourself an astrologer ? " The astrologer felt challenged and said, tilting the other's palm towards the green shaft of light: " Yours is a nature . . ." " Oh, stop that," the other said. " Tell me something worth while. . . "

Our friend felt piqued. " I charge only three pies per question, and what you get ought to be good enough for your money. . . ." At this the other withdrew his arm, took out an anna, and flung it out to him, saying: " I have some questions to ask. If I prove you are bluffing, you must return that anna to me with interest."

" If you find my answers satisfactory, will you give me five rupees? "

" No."

" Or will you give me eight annas ? "

" All right, provided you give me twice as much if you are wrong," said the stranger. This pact was accepted after a little further argument. The astrologer sent up a prayer to heaven as the other lit a cheroot. The astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the matchlight. There was a pause as cars hooted on the road, *jutka*-drivers swore at their horses, and the babble of the crowd agitated the semi-darkness of the park. The other sat down, sucking his cheroot, puffing out, sat there ruthlessly. The astrologer felt very uncomfortable. " Here, take your anna back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today. . . ." He made preparations to bundle up. The other held his wrist and said: " You can't get out of it now. You dragged me in while I was passing." The astrologer shivered in his grip; and his voice shook and became faint. " Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow." The other thrust his palm in his face and said: " Challenge is challenge. Go on." The astrologer proceeded with his throat drying up: " There is a woman . . . "

" Stop," said the other. " I don't want all that. Shall I succeed in my present search or not? Answer this and go. Otherwise I will not let you go till you disgorge all your coins." The astrologer muttered a few incantations and replied: " All right. I will speak. But will you give me a rupee if what I say is convincing? Otherwise I will not open my mouth, and you may do what you like." After a good deal of haggling the other agreed. The astrologer said: " You were left for dead. Am I right? "

" Ah, tell me more."

" A knife has passed through you once? " said the astrologer.

" Good fellow! " He bared his chest to show the scar. "What else?"

" And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead."

" I should have been dead if some passer-by had not chanced to peep into the well," exclaimed the other, overwhelmed by enthusiasm. " When shall I get at him? " he asked, clenching his fist.

" In the next world," answered the astrologer. " He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see any more of him." The other groaned on hearing it. The astrologer proceeded.

" Guru Nayak –"

" You know my name! " the other said, taken aback.

" As I know all other things. Guru Nayak, listen carefully to what I have to say. Your village is two day's journey due north of this town. Take the next train and be gone. I see once again great danger to your life if you go from home." He took out a pinch of sacred ash and held it to him. " Rub it on your forehead and go home. Never travel southward again, and you will live to be a hundred."

" Why should I leave home again? " the other said reflectively. " I was only going away now and then to look for him and to choke out his life if I met him." He shook his head regretfully. " He has escaped my hands. I hope at least he died as he deserved." " Yes," said the astrologer. " He was crushed under a lorry." The other looked gratified to hear it.

The place was deserted by the time the astrologer picked up his articles and put them into his bag. The green shaft was also gone, leaving the place in darkness and silence. The stranger had gone off into the night, after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

It was nearly midnight when the astrologer reached home. His wife was waiting for him at the door and demanded an explanation. He flung the coins at her and said: " Count them. One man gave all that." "

Twelve and a half annas," she said, counting. She was overjoyed. " I can buy some *jaggery* and coconut tomorrow. The child has been asking for sweets for so many days now. I will prepare some nice stuff for her."

" The swine has cheated me! He promised me a rupee," said the astrologer. She looked up at him. " You look worried. What is wrong? "

" Nothing."

After dinner, sitting on the *pyol*, he told her: " Do you know a great load is gone from me today? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years. That was the reason why I ran away from home, settled here, and married you. He is alive."

She gasped. " You tried to kill! "

" Yes, in our village, when I was a silly youngster. We drank, gambled, and quarrelled badly one day why think of it now? Time to sleep," he said, yawning, and stretched himself on the *pyol*.

Answer the following questions about “An Astrologer’s Day”.

1. The main character becomes an astrologer because he _____
2. How does the astrologer make his predictions? _____
3. People were attracted to the astrologer because _____
4. The astrologer felt uncomfortable after Guru Nayak lit his cigar because _____
5. The customer was desperate to get the astrologer’s advice because he wanted to know _____
6. Guru Nayak might not have recognized the astrologer because _____
7. The astrologer ran from his village because _____
8. Where did the astrologer conduct his trade? _____

Choose the appropriate answer.

1. The astrologer does not have a lamp of his own because he

- A. cannot afford a lamp.
- B. has a fire that gives off enough light.
- C. does not want customers to see his face.
- D. prefers the mood set by shadows and half-light.

2. In An Astrologer's Day, what is ironic about the stranger asking if he will succeed in his "present search"?

- A. The stranger knows that he is facing the man that he seeks.
- B. The stranger doesn't realize that success is impossible.
- C. The stranger doesn't know that the astrologer is a fraud.
- D. The stranger has already succeeded, although he doesn't know it.

3. In which of the following statements is the astrologer telling the truth?

- A. “He was crushed under a lorry”.
- B. “I see once again great danger in your life if you go from home”.

- C. "He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see anymore of him".
- D. "And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead".

4. At times, the astrologer answers his customers satisfactorily due to

- A. conjecture.
- B. an informant.
- C. luck.
- D. vision.

5. Before becoming a fortune-teller the astrologer was

- A. a farmer.
- B. married.
- C. a peasant.
- D. rich.

6. He was good at being an astrologer because

- A. of his divine intuition.
- B. of his eloquence.
- C. of his sympathy.
- D. of his wit.

7. Why does the astrologer appear in a form of disguise?

- A. Because he is a prophet.
- B. Because it is compulsory to do so if you are an astrologer.
- C. Because it attracts people.
- D. Because the tradesmen around him were also in disguise.

8. In the end, the astrologer feels

- A. guilty.
- B. at peace with himself.
- C. humiliated.
- D. cheated.

