



LITERATURE STUDY GUIDES AND GUIDED NOTES: A GUIDE TO GUIDED READING

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ABSTRACT

Keeping in mind the challenges brought by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), particularly those connected with independent study and the promotion of variety and flexibility in the learning experience, new teaching strategies are required to cope with new educational demands. One of the problems involved in the teaching of second-language literature at undergraduate level is ensuring that our students read the assigned texts. Reading is a complex communication process which requires thought and individual construction of meaning. Close reading the assigned texts thus is essential to be able to take part in class discussion.

I have introduced `study guides´ and `guided notes´ in the English Literature class not only to help my students become self-sufficient readers but also to make reading and close-reading easier. `Guided notes´ are teacher-prepared hand-outs that outline or map the assigned readings, leaving blank spaces for students to fill in with key concepts, facts or important ideas. `Study guides´ are lists of written questions and activities created to provide direction, and highlight critical information to students.

Results indicated that the introduction of both `guided notes´ and `study guides´ in the classroom was successful at increasing the students´ participation in class discussion and improving their English fluency and articulation of ideas. They were overwhelmingly preferred when compared with students´ reading on their own.

KEY WORDS



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study guides, guided notes, English Literature, guided reading and close reading



INTRODUCTION

Approaches to teaching second language literature at undergraduate levels have significantly changed both as a result of the current process of convergence towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and growing pedagogical interest in the educational value of active learning. Traditional teacher-centred approaches, in which literary texts were taught as “finished products to be unilaterally decoded, analyzed and explained” (Kramsch, 1985: 356), have been progressively but inevitably replaced by student-centred strategies. These recent trends “seek to encourage individual participation, take into account the needs, interests, and desires of students, and focus on the development of communicative skills” (Harper, 1988: 402). A desire to promote reading habits and critical thinking inside and outside the classroom, but at the same time avoid unrealistic expectations and, ultimately, pedagogical failure; has led to more humanistic approaches. They seek to adapt methodologies to the actual level and necessities of undergraduates. In order to do this, it is necessary to put into practice what Paulo Freire calls a “dialogic, problem-solving pedagogy” in which teacher and students become involved in the comprehension-interpretation of the text and “jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1996: 61). Freire’s dialogic pedagogy requires active doers in the classroom. For that reason, students should be given the necessary tools so as to be able to confront the literary text on their own and contribute to the process of re-creation of meaning through the articulation of their personal reactions to the text. Based on the previously mentioned objectives, I will describe my pedagogical approach to English literature in the teaching of “Gèneres Literaris Anglesos del Segle XIX” during the 2006-07 academic course. My method consisted in the implementation of “study guides” and “guided notes” in a 25 student-classroom following the three fold sequence suggested by Harper (1988: 403):

- Pre-literary or pre-interpretation activities.
- Interpretative phase.
- Synthesis or summative activities.



Since classes were based on text discussion, it was necessary for students to read the assigned material in advance. They did it with the guidance of the "study guides" and "guided notes." Such methodology was based on the attempt to accomplish the following specific aims:

- To familiarize students with a wide selection of acknowledged 19th century literary works.
- To develop the student's descriptive and critical skills as readers of literature.
- To promote the student's necessary strategies for independent reading and work in the preparation of:
 - i) oral expositions of articles of literary criticism.
 - ii) written academic papers.
 - To encourage team work through oral expositions.
 - To prepare students for continuous learning.

As said above, "study guides" and "guided notes" should help students get a deeper understanding of literature, see beyond, uncover and create richer and more interesting meanings.

METHODOLOGY

"Study Guides" and "Guided Notes"

"Study guides" may take many forms. In literature classes, they are always centred on the assigned readings of texts of the academic course and consist of lists of written questions or activities created by the teacher to provide direction and highlight critical information to students. "Study guides" provide a structured and organized way to approach readings, sometimes including suggestions for the best ways to work with and think about the new material. "Guided notes," on the other hand, are teacher-prepared hand-outs that outline or map an assigned reading or lecture, leaving blank spaces for students to fill in with key concepts, facts or important ideas. Whenever I used "guided notes" during this course, I included them as part of my "study guides," particularly in cases in which, due to lexical, syntactic,



semantic or cultural content, the text presented difficulties for the students' linguistic abilities.

To illustrate how I worked with Harper's three-phase sequence (pre-reading, interpretation and synthesis activities), I will use examples taken from the "study guides" and "guided notes" I prepared for the discussion of Book 1 (chapters 1 to 5) from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).



i) **Phase 1: Pre-literary or pre-interpretation activities**

Pre-literary or pre-interpretation activities are given prior to the study of the text to help students practice and improve the perceptive and linguistic abilities necessary for a rewarding literary experience. The purpose of these activities may be to: 1) establish a common background of essential information; 2) enhance linguistic skills; 3) verify comprehension; and 4) direct students' reading to develop perceptive abilities and "channel the way they build schemata to make sense of the words on the page" (Kramersch, 1985: 360).

Establishing some common background knowledge of the text reduces reading and comprehension problems. Kramersch suggests using pre-reading questions or activities to give students "some understanding of what the story is about, what the nature of the text is, and when it was written" (Kramersch, 1985: 359). Paintings, photographs, filmstrips or songs that are similar in theme and style to the literary work can be used to present cultural, biographical and historical information or help students spot the major themes or ideas. In my analysis of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, I included a painting (John Martin's "The Bard") as part of the pre-interpretation activities and asked students to relate what they saw in the painting with the title and "possible plot" of the story.

In order to help my students assimilate the lexical material and be familiar with literary terms and concepts I asked them to "brainstorm conceptual associations." For example, to approach Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, I asked my students to write down their concepts of nature, culture, death, reincarnation and God. This way, these key concepts were clarified from the beginning and students alerted to important themes and the diversity of meanings that may be associated to them in the study of the Brontë's work.

As said above, due to the linguistic difficulty of the novel, students were asked to read the first chapters and then given "guided notes" or "fill-in exercises" to complete sentences that reconstructed the major incidents in those chapters. With their books closed, they had to choose the appropriate verb, noun, synonym or adjective to fill in the blanks based on the context of the sentence. I also devised "guided notes" from literary criticism on Brontë's work. I gave my students an excerpt from the introduction to the novel by Patsy Stoneman and then asked them



to fill in the blanks in a summarized version without looking at the original text. This kind of linguistic practice, as Santoni puts it, liberates reading and facilitates understanding and class discussion in the target language (Santoni, 1972: 435-39). After the completion of "guided notes" on the plot of the story, it is generally useful to encourage students to re-tell the episode in their own words, engage in role-playing, if possible, or "predict topic development" (Kramsch, 1985: 361). Effective pre-interpretation activities help ensure success in the following interpretative and synthesis phases.

ii) Phase II: Interpretation

This is the phase in which teacher and students engage in dialogic activity, the teacher as a guide or facilitator and the students as active participants in class discussion. At this point, students should be able to go beyond the literal meaning of the text and discuss what it represents. As Carrell puts it, "the reader makes sense of the text by constructing schemata and interprets through a process of integrating new knowledge and readjusting schema in accord with new information" (Carrell qtd in Harper, 1988: 405). Teachers should design activities that give students opportunity to articulate, defend and negotiate their own ideas so as to counter the interpretations provided by the teacher and peers.

As part of this interpretative phase, my students were asked to:

- compare and contrast the characters of Heathcliff and Catherine,
- study the narrators Lockwood and Nelly Dean,
- explain quotations from the text,
- discuss non-literary forms (films, music, paintings) as parallel texts,
- relate what they had read with their personal lives,
- answer thought provoking or open-ended questions.

iii) Phase III: Synthesis

This phase "transcends the classroom," as Harper says, "and may manifest itself in ongoing appreciation and assimilation of literature that may include expanded wisdom and a new way of looking at oneself and things outside the classroom"



(Harper, 1988: 407). At this stage, students are supposed to reunite the parts, as the previous phases involved a fragmentation of the text. That is why, activities should be directed towards viewing the work as a whole.

Among my synthesis activities, I have included:

- written assignments on certain topics, for instance, the role of “religion” in the novel.
- judging statements based on the text,
- comment on opinions of the author or literary critics,
- class activities such as group discussion,
- viewing film adaptations or other media, similar in theme and style,
- discussing the effect of Brontë’s work on the students.

CONCLUSION

This pedagogical approach to the literary text successfully integrates “study guides” and “guided notes” to Harper’s three-fold sequence, developing students necessary skills for interacting with the text and expressing, negotiating and revising personal interpretations in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The results of the experience were reflected in a final-course survey students filled. Not only did they agree that their interest in the subject and class participation had increased as a result of the implementation of these resources, but also said that the “study guides” and “guided notes” were a successful practice to reading and understanding texts. Their English fluency and articulation of ideas was enhanced and the use of guides was overwhelmingly preferred when compared with students’ reading on their own. Considering the success of the approach, it will be put into practice in successive courses.



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LITERATURE STUDY GUIDES AND GUIDED NOTES

A Guide to Guided Reading



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INTRODUCTION

Approaches to teaching second language literature at undergraduate levels have significantly changed both as a result of the current process of convergence towards the EHEA and growing pedagogical interest in the educational value of active learning. To promote reading and close-reading habits and prepare students for becoming active doers and class participants, teachers should provide them with the necessary tools to be able to confront the literary text on their own.

The purpose of this paper is to describe my pedagogical approach to the literary text based on the previously mentioned objectives and applied to the teaching of "Gèneres Literaris Anglesos del Segle XIX" during the 2006-07 academic course. My approach consisted in the implementation of **study guides** and **guided notes** in a 25 student-classroom, following the three-fold sequence suggested by Harper (1988: 403): i) pre-literary or pre-interpretation activities; ii) interpretative phase; and iii) synthesis or summative activities.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop students' descriptive and critical skills as readers of literature;
- To promote students' necessary strategies for independent work in the preparation of:
 - i) oral expositions of articles of literary criticism,
 - ii) written academic papers;
- To encourage team work through oral expositions;
- To prepare students for continuous learning.

STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF LITERATURE, TO SEE BEYOND, TO UNCOVER AND CREATE RICHER AND MORE INTERESTING MEANINGS.

STUDY GUIDES AND GUIDED NOTES

Study guides are centred on the assigned readings or texts of the academic course.

They consist of lists of written questions and activities created by the teacher to provide direction and highlight critical information to students. **Study guides** provide a structured and organized way to approach readings, sometimes including suggestions for the best ways to work with and think about the new material.

Guided notes are teacher-prepared hand-outs that outline or map an assigned reading or lecture, leaving blank spaces for students to fill in with key concepts, facts or important ideas.

Whenever guided notes were used during the course, they were included as part of Harper's phase 1 of the study guide, for cases in which, due to lexical, syntactic, semantic or cultural content, the text presented difficulties for the students' linguistic abilities.

KEY WORDS:
STUDY GUIDES, GUIDED NOTES,
ENGLISH LITERATURE, GUIDED
READING AND CLOSE READING

PHASE 1: PRE-LITERARY OR PRE-INTERPRETATION ACTIVITIES

Purpose:

- 1) Establish a common background of essential information;
- 2) enhance linguistic skills;
- 3) verify comprehension;
- 4) direct students' reading to develop perceptive abilities and "channel the way they build schemata to make sense of the words on the page" (Kramsch, 1985: 360).

Application in study guides:

- Use of paintings, photographs, filmstrips or songs, similar in theme and style to the literary work, to present cultural, biographical and historical information or help students spot the major themes or ideas.
- "Brainstorm of Conceptual Associations" to help students assimilate the lexical material and be familiar with literary terms and concepts.

Guided Notes: Use of fill-in exercises to complete sentences that reconstruct major incidents or narrative. With their books closed, students have to choose the appropriate verb, noun, synonym or adjective to fill in the blanks based on the context of the sentence.

PHASE 2: INTERPRETATION

Teacher and students engage in "dialogic activity," the teacher as a guide or facilitator and the students as active participants. The reader makes sense of the text by constructing schemata and interprets through a process of integrating new knowledge and readjusting schema in accord with new information (Carrell, 1984).

Application in study guides:

- Activities that give students opportunity to express, justify and then refine their ideas or scheme in light of interpretations provided by the teacher and peers (comparison of characters, though-provoking or open-ended questions, discussion of quotations, etc)

PHASE 3: SYNTHESIS

It "manifests itself in ongoing appreciation and assimilation of literature that may include expanded wisdom and a new way of looking at oneself and things outside the classroom" (Harper, 1988: 407).

Application in study guides:

- Activities directed towards viewing the work as a whole (written assignments, judging statements based on the text, comment on opinions of the author or critics, class activities such as group discussion or viewing a film or other media, similar in theme and style, to discuss the effect of the work on the students.

CONCLUSION

This pedagogical approach has integrated Harper's three-fold sequence into "study guides" and "guided notes," helping students develop the necessary skills for interacting with the text on their own and express, negotiate and revise personal interpretations. The results of the experience were reflected in a final-course survey given to students. Not only did they agree that their interest in the subject and class participation had increased as a result of the implementation of these resources, but they also said that the "study guides" and "guided notes" were extremely useful as practices to reading and understanding texts. Their English fluency and articulation of ideas were enhanced and the use of guides overwhelmingly preferred when compared with students' reading on their own. Considering the success of the strategy, it will continue to be used in successive literature courses.