

WORKING WITH A SECOND-LANGUAGE TEXT

An Empathy Exercise

Author: Lilian Nygren

1. Read through the first couple of pages/paragraphs of a text in a second/foreign language. Time should be limited to 5, 10, or 15 minutes.
2. Write a short summary (=5-10 lines) of what you read.
3. Answer the following questions in writing:
 - a) What did you do when you found unfamiliar words and/or expressions in the text?
 - b) What did you do if you understood every single word but still could not make sense of the phrase or sentence?
 - c) How did you use any (potential) advance knowledge of the topic when you were reading the text?
 - d) Did you experience any “language fatigue” during the reading? If so, at what point did it happen?
4. If you have extra time on hand, continue reading the text (unless you have already finished reading it).
5. If this is done in a class, groups of four or five should now be formed. In group discussions, compare the answers to the above questions. Answer the following questions together with the group members:
 - a) Were the text summaries different? If so, how and why?
 - b) Were the written answers to the questions in point 3 similar? If not, in what way were they different? (Discuss the reasons behind the differences!)
 - c) What would it have been like to discuss these questions in the language of the text you read? Would it affect the group dynamics? If so, in what way?
6. Write for 5 minutes about your own performance. What went well and what was less successful? (If you were working with a group, did you feel that the others had found the text more or less difficult than you did? Why did they and how do you know?) What did you learn from answering the questions (and the group discussions) that will be useful the next time you read a text in this language?
7. How will this experience influence how you deal with second language pupils in your classroom?