

MAKING LITERATURE ACCESSIBLE TO LEARNERS

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There are certain things that a man ought to know or to know about and literature is one of them. One of the arguments for teaching literature as a means of teaching English is for cultural purpose. Of course there are many other reasons for which literature is so highly valued, among these being the fact that literature helps develop the students' interpretative abilities, provides motivating material, serves as language model, helps students grow as individuals, challenges students to discover themselves, educating the whole person.

Our paper aims at presenting the main communicative approaches to using literature in the classroom. From the point of view of the objectives the teacher has in mind when using literature in the classroom, three are the most common approaches: the Language Based Approach, the Cultural Approach and the Personal Growth Approach. The conclusion we reached is that a combination of these three approaches would seem most appropriate when teaching ELT.

There are certain things that a man ought to know or to know about and literature is one of them. Literature is the record of the attempt of writers to express and communicate their ideas about man's hopes, dreams, ideals, feelings, thoughts and experience and his relationship to society. Literature deals with the life of man in moments of crisis and anguish, with the most intimate relationships, "with his inner thoughts and his deepest loves and hates, with his courage, honour, hope, pride, compassion, pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past"ⁱ.

There are many reasons why literature is so highly valued, being used in the language classroom in many countries around the world. The traditional view that the study of literature broadens the students' intellectual horizons and sharpens his sensibilities has served as a base as well as a theoretical framework for the teaching of literature. After all, "literature is both a mirror that reflects the inner soul of people and a pathway towards a deeper understanding of cultures and societies"ⁱⁱ.

One of the arguments for teaching literature is for cultural purpose. Literature expresses the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings and teaching literature represents a means by which the student can be put in touch with a range of expression - often of universal value and validity – over a historical period or periods. Reading literature of a historical period is, after all, one of the ways we have to help us imagine what life was like in that other

territory. Literature is perhaps best seen as a complement to other materials to increase the foreign learner's insight into the country whose language is being learnt.

Of course there are many other reasons for which literature is so highly valued, among these being the fact that literature helps develop the students' interpretative abilities, provides motivating material, serves as language model, helps students grow as individuals, challenges students to discover themselves, educating the whole person. It is very difficult to say which of the reasons above is more or less important, it all depends on the purposes, on the objectives the teacher has in mind or on the stage of the lessons.

Main communicative approaches to ENHANCE using literature in the classroom

From the point of view of the objectives the teacher has in mind when using literature in the classroom three are the most common approaches: the Language Based Approach, the Cultural Approach and the Personal Growth Approach.

The Language Based Approach – In the language model the emphasis is given on language as the literary medium. The underlying idea is that the detailed analysis of the language of the literary text will help students not only to make meaningful interpretations of it, but will also increase their general awareness and understanding of English. Literary texts are thus seen as a resource which provides stimulating language activities. Literature is taught for the promotion of vocabulary, structures and language manipulation. The students are put in touch with the subtle and varied creative uses of language and the emphasis is on language observation. The advantages of using literary texts for language activities are that they offer a wide range of styles and registers; they are open to multiple interpretations and hence provide excellent opportunities for classroom discussion; and they focus on genuinely interesting and motivating topics to explore in the classroom.

On the other hand, the readers' responses to the literary texts are totally neglected and the approach may result instead in mechanistic and demotivating teaching practices spoiling any pleasure that the reading of good literature can give. In addition, the contribution of the teaching of literature to the students' emotional involvement and to their personal growth seems to be totally neglected.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Cultural Approach - This approach highlights the teaching of literature for its value in 'encapsulating the accumulated wisdom, the best that has been thought and felt within a culture.'^{iv} Works of literature are the relics of culture and through their 'study' students understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space. This is the most traditional approach and it involves "the study of history and

characteristics of literary movements; the social, political and historical background to a text, literary genres and rhetorical devices, etc.”^v

Personal Growth Approach – In this approach, students are encouraged to express their opinions, feelings, and make connections between their own personal and cultural experiences and those expressed in the text. The student constructs meaning on the basis of their own experience. Such an approach helps students to become more actively involved both intellectually and emotionally in learning English and hence aids acquisition. It is an excellent stimulus for group work.

Materials chosen need to be appropriate to students’ interests and to stimulate a high level of personal involvement. Thematic organization of materials is very often used. This kind of approach is also called “*Literature for life*” approach because it helps students progress as individuals through reading.

To sum up, it seems that ***a combination of these three approaches would seem most appropriate for classroom use. What we need is an approach to teaching literature in the EFL classroom which attempts to integrate these elements in a way that makes literature accessible to learners and beneficial for their linguistic and cultural development.***

ⁱ W. Faulkner, *Nobel Prize Speech*, reprinted from *The Faulkner Reader*, Random House, Inc., 1954

ⁱⁱ Denis Delaney, Ciaran Ward, Carla Rho Fiorina *Fields of Vision*, Pearson Education Limited, 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ Zafeiriadou, *On Literature in the EFL Classroom*. Consulted at <http://tesolgreece.com/nl/71/7104.html>

^{iv} Carter and Long 1991:2.

^v Lazar, G. p. 34– *Literature and Language Teaching*, Cambridge, 1993

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