

## **Authentic Readings: A Tool to Promote Critical Thinking, Cultural Sensitivity and Students' Autonomy in EFL Oral Communication Courses**

*M.A. Cinthya Olivares Garita*

Universidad Nacional Sede Regional Brunca, Costa Rica  
cinthya.olivares.garita@una.cr

*M.A. Lena Barrantes Elizondo*

Universidad Nacional Sede Regional Brunca, Costa Rica  
lenna07@gmail.com

**Resumen:** No todas las lecturas que los profesores eligen son útiles para desarrollarlas en los cursos de comunicación oral. Existe una necesidad urgente de evaluar gran parte del material de lectura de estas clases para así determinar su nivel de autenticidad ya que ésta debe llegar a ser una característica fundamental de este tipo de material. Las lecturas auténticas deben incitar al pensamiento cuando se utilizan con las técnicas apropiadas. Aunque sea una lectura corta el simple hecho de que se refiera a un evento real puede provocar una reacción personal en el estudiante. La investigación de acción que se presenta en este documento fue realizada con estudiantes de la carrera Enseñanza del Inglés de la Universidad Nacional, Sede Regional Brunca y busca identificar algunos de los efectos de incorporar lecturas auténticas en las clases de expresión oral y proponer un instrumento para definir el nivel de autenticidad de las lecturas seleccionadas así como también algunas técnicas para promover el pensamiento crítico, la sensibilidad cultural y la autonomía a través del uso de textos genuinos y realistas.

**Palabras clave:** Pensamiento crítico, autenticidad, autoconfianza, responsabilidad personal, sensibilidad cultural.

**Abstract:** Not all readings that teachers stumble upon are worth using in oral communication courses. There is an urging need to evaluate most of the reading material EFL classes are currently based on to determine the level of its authenticity. Authenticity must become a fundamental feature of readings used in the EFL classroom. Authentic readings might be thought provoking when handled with the appropriate techniques. Even if it is a short reading, the fact that it entails a real event or happening provokes a personal reaction in the student. The action research presented in this documented was conducted with students of the English Teaching Major at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension. It attempts at identifying some of the effects of incorporating authentic readings in oral expression courses and at proposing an instrument to define the level of authenticity of the readings selected as well as some techniques to promote students' critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and autonomy through the use of genuine and realistic texts.

**Key words:** critical thinking, authenticity, self-confidence, personal accountability, cultural sensitivity

## I Introduction

Teaching English is not an easy endeavor. On the one hand, its myriad components may make it an overwhelming goal for students. On the other hand, teachers might, consciously or unconsciously, overlook the importance of all the linguistic skills. Downplaying one linguistic skill or feature may disrupt the students' effective performance. From this standpoint, language needs to be assumed as a holistic system, all skills integrated, as delineated by the Communicative Approach. Although speaking and listening have been highly acknowledged due to the importance of oral communication nowadays, reading must not be separated from them. Reading can work as a springboard for students to jump to a better level of English competence and performance.

Undoubtedly, the use of readings may depend on how the teacher tackles the exercises. The preparation of the exercises has to be painstakingly schemed. It is worth noting that a language is successfully exceled from a more integrated approach. Thus, reading is better undertaken when any other linguist skill is integrated, for instance speaking. This fact coupled with authenticity makes the use of readings a really valuable element in the EFL oral communication courses. Furthermore, reading helps learners build a vast number of elements that are crucial to reach linguistic success. This study is aimed to promote strategies by incorporating authentic readings in order to strengthen critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and autonomy and build enough criteria to evaluate authenticity in texts.

## II Literature review

### 2. 1 Definition of Reading

Reading, not long ago regarded as a passive skill, has evolved to become a more interactive skill. This interaction between the reader, the writer and the meaning of the text makes reading a unique learning experience. Alderson (2000) conceived reading as "...an enjoyable, intense, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed" (p. 28). Reading is a very purposeful activity that surrounds individuals and urges them to decode the written message. Whatever the aim of reading may be: learning, survival or pleasure, it is enveloped in everyday duties. Seen from this perspective, it is an essential part of individuals' lives that empowers them to interpret what is written. From a more instructional viewpoint, reading involves a real exposure to writing and provides "opportunities to study language: vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and the way [learners] construct sentences, paragraphs and texts" (Harmer, 1998, p. 68).

Readers decode the written meaning in two distinct ways: bottom-up and top-down processes. The selection of these processes depends on the purpose of the readers. Bottom-up processing helps the readers approach language from a more detailed form. The focus is on specific linguistic aspects that are tackled in isolation. The reader builds up meaning by "reading word for word, letter for letter carefully scrutinizing both vocabulary and syntax" (Sacha, 2006, p.61). Conversely, top-down processing exposes the reader to

an ample view of the language. This goes from discourse, utterances, sentences, phrases until getting to the smallest units of the language. Schema activation is required to favor the learners' proper guesses and interpretations of meaning. Unfortunately, neither of these two reading approaches may be ultimately successful for learners that are inclined towards a more balanced approach.

According to Alderson (1998) "the most comprehensive description of the reading process are interactive models in which every component in the reading process can interact with any other component combining elements of both bottom-up and top-down models" (p. 18). This integration of both approaches facilitates the effectiveness of the reading processes. The reader when faced with a new written text carries multiple expectations, ideas, beliefs, prejudices and inferences that are grounded on his or her background knowledge. This prior knowledge incites the learner to stop and think about his or her understanding of the separate linguistic units of the written message in order to test his or her hypotheses derived from this general or world knowledge. Unquestionably, these two complementary models are salient actions to consider when planning a successful EFL class.

#### 2.1.1 Reading in the EFL Classroom

Planning an EFL class involves an everyday struggle even for teachers who seem to have gained enough experience in the field. A successful lesson plan must integrate the linguistic skills as to promote students' efficient grasp of the target language. Upon dealing with the idea of integration, all four skills listening, speaking, writing and reading complement and interrelate with each other. Thus, reading lends itself to fulfill speaking objectives.

Depending on the nature and emphasis of the course, this integration may place higher importance on one of the four skills over the others. For instance, in high school contexts reading is treated for a more academic angle where reading skills are overemphasized. In other EFL settings, there is still an academic purpose where reading is tackled from a bottom-up approach. In university courses, and if English is the object and the means of learning, reading is seen from a more meaningful purpose where reading facilitates knowledge of the target language through a vast array of skill-integrated exercises. From this standpoint, a question arises, what are the most suitable reading materials to assist students on their way to successful language learning?

### 2.2 Authentic Materials and Authenticity: Wise Choices

Although some experts agree that there are just two types of materials or sources, a third category can also be drawn. From this viewpoint authentic, non-authentic and authentic-simulated sources will be analyzed.

#### 2.2.1. Authentic or Non-pedagogical Sources

When selecting reading materials for the EFL class, several inquiries may come into play. One evident doubt accounts for the type of sources teachers must use: non-authentic or authentic materials. According to Nunan (1989) authentic materials are "any material which has not been specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching" (as cited in Macdonald, Badger & White, 2000, p. 19). These non-pedagogical materials are rich in

natural linguistic forms as they are used in real life, among the spoken ones such as TV commercials, films, news, weather forecasts, airport and station announcement, radio talks, interviews and debates. More examples of this type are recipes, articles, train/plane timetables, advertisements, brochures, poems, application forms, and instruction for the use of equipment can be listed. Authentic texts, specifically, are written for native speakers; thus, the language contained is “real” and representative of the purest use of it.

Based on Peacock’s (1997) idea, these types of texts are “materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community” (p. 2). In light of this assumption, authentic texts embody sufficient varied forms “whereas in a non-authentic text there is often one single structure that is repeated” (Neikova, 2005, p.2). This feature of texts makes them worth reading since the reader is hooked in a dual purpose: reading for life and reading for learning the language. The former purpose provides knowledge to the individual to comply with the routine tasks. The latter contributes to the linguistic formation of learners outside and inside the classroom if this type of material is believed to support the EFL class plan.

### 2.2.2 Non-authentic or Pedagogical Sources

Unlike authentic sources non-authentic sources are materials addressed to solve the needs of the learners in a realistic or, much of the time, in an artificial environment like the classroom. Neikova (2005) sustained that these types of sources “are usually over-explicit and that they say too much because they lack the natural redundancy of authentic ones; they abound with details, so, the students are not given the chance to make any inference” (p. 2). They are pedagogical sources devoid of linguistic “naturalness.” On the contrary, language forms have been modified to fit the students’ level, topic and sequence of a language curriculum. On this account, students are limited, not to say restricted, to the presentation of language according to an already-fit scheme based on a needs assessment analysis.

### 2.2.3. Authentic-simulated Sources

Teachers can even draw nearer authenticity by subtly tailoring texts that simulate an authentic one. Even though the idea is to make-believe that students are dealing with a non-pedagogical source, they benefit from this attempt in the sense that vocabulary and syntactical forms are derived from genuine settings. Harmer (1998) proposed this third category by establishing that

A balance has to be struck between real English, on one hand, and the student’s capabilities on the other. (...) We may want to offer texts, which, while being like English, are nevertheless written, or adapted especially for their level. The important thing is that such texts are as much like real English as possible. (p. 100)

This is the type of sources teachers can take advantage of as long as this adaptation occurs for the sake of the learners themselves. An adapted or abridged text can bring about a series of advantages as well. These sources may elucidate real examples of the target language and culture at a lesser level than authentic ones, but still be favorable for students to gain better linguistic performance in the long run.

#### 2.2.4 The Use of Authentic Materials in the EFL Classroom

The term “authentic” may sound pervasive to teachers drowned in a world where language textbooks govern. Many of them tend to reject the use of authentic materials due to the disadvantages these sources may bring. These teachers may show apprehensive about the use of authentic sources because elements such as lexicon and forms seem to be elevated and they may run the risk of not knowing the meanings.

There is a vast array of activities that can be devised for teachers to incorporate authentic materials in the class and for students to enhance their English performance. Even though the use of these materials may represent a challenge to teachers, there are ways by which they can be handled to suit the purposes of the class strategically. Senior (2005) highlighted the fact that the use of these materials must always have a purpose when brought to the classroom (p.71). The availability of authentic sources like TV commercials, films, news, weather forecasts, airport and station announcements, radio talks, interviews and debates, recipes, articles, train/plane/bus timetables, advertisements, brochures, poems, application forms, and instruction for the use of equipment help the teacher to diversify the activities and exercises in the classroom.

Nowadays, there is even a more powerful source that envelops a great deal of options: internet. This is a tool that has revolutionized the EFL world becoming a tall order in such a scenario. Its use must be tactfully planned to make the most out of all the advantages it may bring about. Upon mentioning all these types of authentic sources, it is worth mentioning that all these tools must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny based on thorough criteria for their selection and effective use.

#### 2.2.5. Criteria to Select Authentic Reading Materials

Although some authors suggest different criteria to select authentic reading materials, Lee and Nuttall stand out among many. Both authors agree on similar criteria such as exploitability and suitability of content. Lee (1995) listed two more criteria: textual authenticity and compatibility with course objectives. Nuttall (1996) added presentation and readability.

Exploitability refers to the flexibility of the text to be used in diverse activities and to what extent it promotes the use of different strategies or skills. Suitability of content evaluates how interesting, engaging and attention-grabbing the text is from the students' point of view. It includes the relevance and meaningfulness the text brings to students' lives. Textual authenticity encloses the manifestations of “real” and “natural” language that appears in the text and how representative of the target language the linguistic forms are. Compatibility with course objectives relates to how suitable the text content is for the goals of the language class. Presentation gauges how appealing the appearance of the text can be. Readability assesses the difficulty of the text according to the addressed students' level concerning structures and lexicon. It analyzes the number of times students may encounter new words or forms in the text. Further criteria like variety and novelty, natural language, text authenticity and text challenge can help build proper criteria to consider when selecting authentic readings.

2.2.6 The Advantages to Using Authentic Readings in Oral Courses

The use of authentic sources in EFL oral courses suggests text-based instruction where the selection of the texts depending on the students’ level, age, interest and goals may hinder or facilitate learning in the classroom. A number of contributions as well as some downsides can be drawn from using authentic readings in the classroom. The following table exhibits the main arguments for and against the use of these texts according to Richards (2001):

**Table 2.2.6.1 Arguments in Favor and Against the Use of Authentic Materials**

<i>Arguments for the use of authentic materials</i>	<i>Arguments against the use of authentic materials</i>
Positive effect on learner motivation	Often contain difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items and complex language structures, which cause a burden for the teacher in lower-level classes and demotivate low-level students
Authentic cultural information	Too culturally biased
Exposure to real language	Many structures are mixed causing lower levels to have a hard time decoding the texts
More closely to learners’ needs and interests	Its use is time-consuming for the teacher
More creative approach to teaching	May not expose students to comprehensible input at the earliest stages of acquisition
Provide a wide variety of text types, language styles not easily found in conventional teaching materials	
Continuously updated	
Positive effect on comprehension and learner satisfaction	

Note: The criteria cited in the chart account for the ones suggested by Richards (2006) as quoted in Berardo (2006).

**2.3. Critical Thinking Skills**

Upon the analysis of the positive and negative aspects of the use of authentic sources, teachers may find the need to enhance salient points of the advantages through the development of the activities they set in the classroom. Critical thinking is one of those points teachers can heighten throughout the lesson. Based on Paul and Elder’ assumptions (2008), critical thinking is acknowledged as

Self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism. (p. 4)

Undoubtedly, the management of these skills should be embedded in the distinct exercises properly scaffolded to get the students to develop effective reasoning. Lynch and Wolcott (2001) pointed out a series of steps that can efficiently help the teacher to scaffold students’ understanding to reach operative critical skills

- Step 1 — identify the problem, relevant information, and uncertainties;
- Step 2 — explore interpretations and connections;
- Step 3 — prioritize alternatives and communicate conclusions; and
- Step 4 — integrate, monitor, and refine strategies for re-addressing the problem. (p. 2)

By implementing these steps teachers get successful critical thinkers to manage the problem-solving exercises and cope with conflicts in an open-endedness way through a profound analysis of causes and consequences and deliberation of the results.

Bloom stressed the importance of higher and lower order thinking skills to develop reasoning. In the light of this division, “critical thinking itself is defined as having two components: 1) skills to generate information (lower order thinking) and 2) using those skills to guide behavior (higher order thinking)” (Sullivan, 2012, para. 4). These skills are also divided into six levels such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Helping the students to move up to a different level of cognition requires careful planning of the incorporation of these skills to the activities selected.

#### **2.4. Culture Sensitivity**

Another aspect teachers dealing with authentic reading sources must consider is culture sensitivity. Culture is a recurring element in genuine texts; these types of texts portray and resemble the target culture in its purest form. Although this element is easily spotted in authentic texts, it may be overlooked and not treated properly. Raising sensitivity towards the target culture is a significant role played by teachers in the EFL classroom. The reason why this aspect must be tackled is to guarantee students’ holistic formation of the target language. Learning a language implies knowledge about the system (systemic knowledge) and knowledge of the world (schematic knowledge). The latter signifies the knowledge represented by the individuals’ perspectives of the world, beliefs, assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes.

These two types of knowledge encapsulate the most successful way towards language proficiency. Stuart and Nocon(1996) shed light upon the importance of incorporating culture by stating that “learning about the lived culture of actual target language speakers as well as about one’s own culture requires tools that assist language learners in negotiating meaning and understanding the communicative and cultural texts in which linguistic codes are used” (p.432). McKay (2000) stressed the significance of the cultural component by stating that “it will foster learner motivation” (p.7). She supported the incorporation of a variety of cultural materials in the activities students perform to sensitize their appreciation of the target language group. Standford et all (1997) defined cultural sensitivity as “being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and have an effect on values, learning, and behavior” (p.35). The more students get to know about the foreign language, the greater their understanding and tolerance towards it will be. Their willingness to participate and explore this community language group increases as well as their valuing diversity and lessening misconceptions. Therefore, cultural awareness heightens as the students develop this empathy.

#### **2.5. Learner Autonomy**

As students advance in their attempt to learn the foreign language, materials must be fraught with multiple factors to strengthen their instructional process. In this process of teaching a language, one of the utmost objectives of every single teacher is to empower the learners to become independent and accountable for their own learning. Learner autonomy, even though it is thought to be reached at higher levels of linguistic competence,

can be fostered since the very moment students set their learning strategies in the first stages of the process. Considering Little's (2004) definition of this element, learner autonomy is described as "learning how to learn intentionally" (p. 105).

Other authors have contributed to build a broader concept of autonomy by adding three main elements which are motivation (Ushioda, 1996, as cited in Reinders, p. 41), awareness (van Lier, 1996, as cited in Reinders, p. 41) and interaction (Kohonen, 1990, as cited in Reinders, p. 41). All these ingredients can be exploited through the use of authentic readings since students are encouraged and motivated to deeply explore the language from other angles and with their own capacities. Sometimes students' motivation is such that they keep up with their interest in the topic when being outside the classroom. Such motivation leads them to search for more information in other authentic sources.

### III. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to identify some possible effects of incorporating authentic readings in oral expression courses and to propose an instrument to define the level of authenticity of the readings selected as well as some techniques to promote students' critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and autonomy through the use of genuine and realistic texts.

#### 3.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research questions that this study aimed to answer are:

- 1) Are teachers currently using authentic readings in oral communication courses to promote students' critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and autonomy?
- 2) Which are the criteria of selection of readings followed by teachers?
- 3) Which are some possible effects of incorporating authentic readings in oral expression courses?

#### 3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

##### 3.2.1 *The Participants*

The informants in this study were twenty students of the English Teaching Major at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension. Ten of them were taking Oral Communication: Commerce and Economy in their third year of instruction while the other ten were taking Oral Communication: Social Issues in their second year. Their ages range from 20 to 25 years old. A random sampling method was used to select them. They were chosen from a list of 60 students enrolled in oral communication courses. Ten professors were also key informants in this study. All of them hold a master's degree and have taught in the program for more than four years.

##### 3.2.2 *The Instruments*

Two instruments were designed to gather data. One questionnaire was intended to gather key data about students' insights about the role of authentic readings in oral communication courses. The other instrument was a questionnaire for the teachers so that their impressions were collected.



### 3.2.3 Analysis and Results

An exhaustive examination of students' responses and data gathered drawn the next analysis. Each of the research questions is answered in this section.

#### Results and discussion of question 1- Are teachers currently using authentic readings in oral communication courses to promote students' critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and autonomy?

In order to verify language teachers are familiar with the concept "authentic readings", they were requested to provide a definition. Their answers reveal that all of them have a clear understanding. They listed ideas such as *material created for other purposes than teaching a language, written material designed to inform and entertain not to teach and texts that were not written for teaching purposes*. Indeed, they even listed some examples like articles and information from newspapers and magazines, ads, songs and books. They all agreed that they prefer authentic readings over textbook passages. However, one informant stated that depending on the students' level, this type of reading is not really effective in beginner students who struggle to grasp comprehension. In question seven, they mentioned the reasons behind this preference. The next graph shows the results of this multiple-answer question.

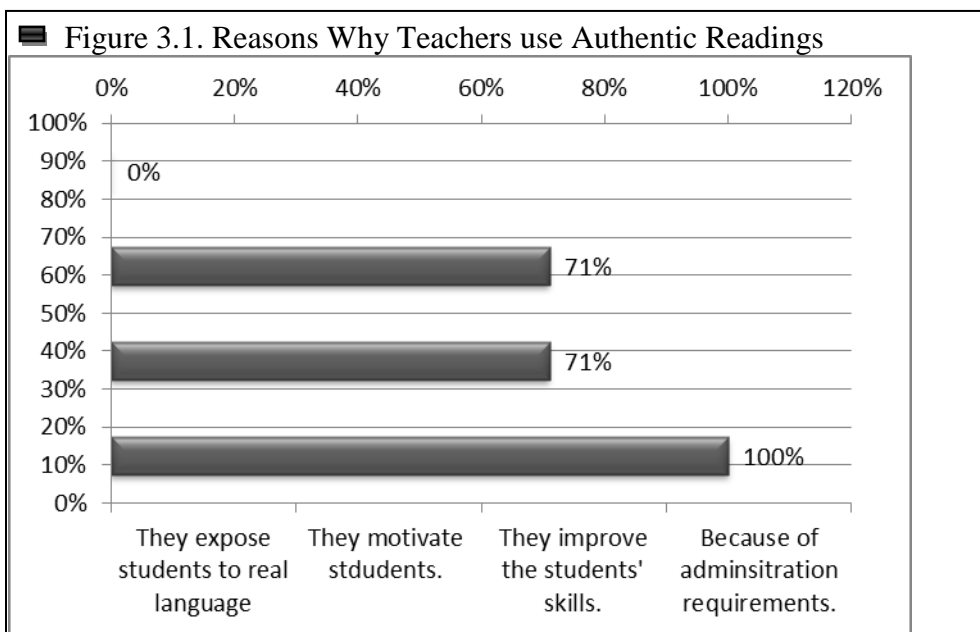


Figure 3.1. This figure displays data from a multiple-response question from the instrument *Questionnaire for the Teacher* administered in August 2012.

These answers reveal that teachers identified valid reasons to use these texts. However, one respondent stated that sometimes s/he does not use this type of readings because of syllabus constraints since topics and objectives limit this practice. Teachers listed some of the

exercises they commonly develop in the class with authentic readings. The majority of them mentioned interrogative questions, true/ false, discussion and debates. A small percentage provided students with projects and response papers in which critical thinking and autonomy are highly promoted.

### **Results and discussion of question 2- What are the criteria of selection of readings followed by teachers?**

Teaching material selection is an integral part of class planning. Consequently, language instructors should not underestimate the effect of careless practice. By keeping a sound criterion, programs and teachers are guaranteeing a high commitment while assuring effective classroom practice that will be reflected on students' linguistic achievement. The teachers in this study demonstrated to have a clear path to follow when choosing readings. They all agreed that authenticity of the readings is a priority. In fact, 100 % of the students questioned answered that their teachers always include readings from magazines and newspapers, and 95 % of them stated that those readings portray real-life events that help them confront what they learn in the class with what they face in real life. Teachers mentioned that aspects such as language level, course objectives and students' needs are over layout and currency (see table 3.2) which turn to be not important issues to consider. Indeed, only 30 % of the pupils affirmed that classroom readings are outdated which means that teachers usually take care when choosing the readings. Additionally to this, one teacher mentioned that the editor of the magazine or newspaper where texts are taken is a key aspect to consider as well.

Regarding the need to have specific training to use authentic material, 70 % of the teachers agreed that they would like to be part of training sessions while 30 % stated that they do not need this type of instruction. Informants who showed to be interested in training expressed they require particular training in both material design and material selection.

**Table 3.2**  
*Criteria of Selection of Readings*

Criteria of selection of readings used by the teachers	Use		Percentage of cases
	N	Percentage	
Language level	7	26%	70%
Length of the text	5	19%	50%
Students' needs	6	22%	60%
Course objectives	7	26%	70%
Layout	1	4%	10%
Currency	1	4%	10%
Total	27	100%	270%

*Note: N= number of responses provided by the informants.*

Their responses brought to light that they do not possess sound criteria to select authentic readings. They put aside principles like textual authenticity, text challenge, natural language and exploitability.

### **Results and discussion of question 3- Which are some possible effects of incorporating authentic readings in oral expression courses?**

When researching the effects of authentic readings in oral communication courses, teachers identified specific ways in which they favor students' learning process. Their responses are summarized in the next table.

**Table 3.3**

*Possible Effects of Incorporating Authentic Readings*

<b>Authentic readings in the oral communication class benefit students'...</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Critical thinking</b>	90%
<b>Cultural sensitivity</b>	50%
<b>Autonomy</b>	80%

*Note:* informants provided this information in a multiple-answer question in which they ranked the benefits.

For teachers, critical thinking enhancement is the most recognized benefit. They actually identified levels of critical thinking skills promoted by authentic readings; they listed knowledge application, analysis, synthesis in a higher degree in contrast with evaluation and application. Autonomy was also categorized as an immediate benefit followed by cultural sensitivity. These same informants added that other effects are that students notice structures in context and acquire worldwide knowledge. Meanwhile, students identified two main positive effects. Indeed, 85 % of the pupils agreed that authentic readings make them feel engaged in the class while 80% responded that these types of readings give them the chance to present their opinions.

## **IV. Conclusions**

From the previous data analysis and the theoretical contributions examination, significant conclusions are drawn. First, it was put in evidence that the use of authentic readings in the EFL classroom is a common practice that deserves special attention to promote their proper and systematic use. Second, teachers are conscious about the many benefits this practice has on students' critical thinking, autonomy and cultural sensitivity which unfold the need to promote effective and systematic use of authentic sources in the EFL oral courses. Third, particular training on how to select authentic material is an unhindered need claimed by teachers. Consequently, the researchers identify the urge to design an instrument to define the level of authenticity of the readings to be used which is appended to this report. Finally, there exist vast sources of authentic materials in which the internet plays a key role. When one considers the practicality of this technological resource, it is inevitable to take advantage of it in daily classroom practice. Nevertheless, the selection of readings from internet merits a more sensible and deep analysis.

## 4.2 The Proposal

This proposal envelops two main contributions. First, the design of a set of techniques drawn from the main benefits obtained from authentic readings: critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and autonomy used as a bookmark. Each technique in the bookmark comprises a set of questions to help the student build understanding of these main contributions of authentic readings. Second, based on the needs identified in this study, a rubric to evaluate authenticity and usefulness of readings in oral expression courses was designed as an action plan to satisfy teachers' and students' needs in oral communication courses. This rubric is founded on theoretical references of experts in the field as Nuttall and Lee who established elements like suitability of content, exploitability, readability, presentation, textual authenticity, compatibility with class objectives, variety and novelty, text challenge and natural language to validate the usefulness and authenticity of texts.

### 4.2.2 First Proposal Contribution: Authentic Reading Techniques Bookmark

This is a creative design that teachers can also customize depending on the questions they want the students to be focused on. The bookmark encompasses the three different categories (critical thinking, cultural sensitivity and linguistic autonomy) containing a set of questions for each one. The idea is to provide students with a customized bookmark like the one given in the appendix and keep it handy in order to use it with any reading previously regarded as an authentic one by teachers. With a periodical use of this bookmark students are taken through the levels of critical thinking, are sensitized towards the target and other foreign cultures and develop curiosity for unknown words, pronunciation and phrases.

#### 4.2.2.1 Critical Thinking

The main levels according to Bloom for lower and higher order thinking skills are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and creation. To work out every reading teachers request students to use in the classroom a set of questions for each of the levels must be addressed. The following chart suggests some of the questions teachers may use:

**Table 4.2.2.1** *Bloom's Taxonomy of Lower and Higher Order Thinking Skills*

<b>Knowledge</b>	what, who, when, where, how
<b>Comprehension</b>	What about? What is the main idea of? What...show? How would you compare/contrast?
<b>Application</b>	How would you use...? What would be the result if...?
<b>Synthesis</b>	Why do you think...?What is the theme/moral?
<b>Evaluation</b>	What is your opinion of...?What would you recommend?How would you rate?
<b>Creating</b>	How would you improve? What is an original way for the...?

*Note:* The column on the left denotes the different thinking skills levels. The three first represent the lower thinking skills level and the other three the higher order thinking skills levels. Each level contains a set of questions used as examples for teachers to choose from and modify the bookmark when needed.

#### 4.2.2.2 Cultural Sensitivity

Being aware of existing cultures brings sensitivity to students' lives and modifies their mindset. For every reading teachers set to study in the classroom, a set of culture-oriented questions must be posed to raise awareness which, in turn, will help sensitize students:

1. What cultural group is portrayed in the reading?
2. What cultural differences might I encounter?
3. Would that be acceptable/prohibited in my culture? Why?
4. Why do I think he/she/they behave/think the way they did?

#### 4.2.2.4. Autonomy

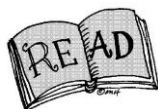
Autonomy implies students to move beyond the techniques teachers customarily give them in the classroom. They behave independently and productively on their own outside the classroom. The idea is to lead students to acquire their own study habits by carrying out a set of out-of-the-classroom exercises on a daily/week basis. Vocabulary, idioms and pronunciation are the three major aspects that will be tackled in this proposal.

#### *4.2.5. Second Proposal Contribution: Rubric*

##### 4.2.5.1 Evaluation Rubric to Assess the Authenticity and Usefulness of Readings

This second contribution of the proposal is for teachers to evaluate the level of authenticity and usefulness of readings brought to students. Teachers analyze any reading by comparing its content with the aspects determined by the criteria in the rubric. They decide the score on a scale from 1 to 3. Important notes can be jotted down on the right column.

Category	Scoring Criteria	Points	Observations
Suitability of Content	Very interesting, thought-provoking, relevant to these students' needs.	3	
	Somewhat interesting, thought-provoking, relevant to these students' needs.	2	
	Not interesting, thought-provoking, relevant to these students' needs.	1	
Exploitability	Very useful to develop students' competence in distinct ways.	3	
	Somewhat useful to develop students' competence in distinct ways.	2	
	Not useful to develop students' competence in distinct ways.	1	
Readability	The combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text is very suitable for these students' level.	3	
	The combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text is somewhat suitable for these students' level.	2	
	The combination of structural and lexical difficulty of a text is not suitable for these students' level.	1	
Presentation	A very "authentic" and attractive presentation through the use of pictures, diagrams, photographs and the like.	3	
	A somewhat "authentic" and attractive presentation through the use of pictures, diagrams, photographs and the like.	2	
	Not an "authentic" and attractive presentation through the use of pictures, diagrams, photographs and the like.	1	
Textual	The text describes or narrates a very real and updated event.	3	



## Authenticity and Usefulness of Readings

### Evaluation Rubric



**Objective:** This analytic rubric aims to evaluate authenticity and usefulness of readings in oral expression courses.

Score:

**Instructions:** A) Select a text B) Examine the following aspects and grade the text by choosing a score from 1 to 3. C) If the text scores less than 9 points, it is a non-authentic text. If it scores from 9 to 18, it is a partially authentic text. If it scores from 18 to 27, it can be acknowledged as an authentic text.

authenticity	The text describes or narrates a somewhat real and updated event.	2	
	The text doesn't describe or narrate a real and updated event.	1	
Compatibility with course objectives	The text lends itself to being studied or used to ask very good questions and developed very good tasks according to the course objectives.	3	
	The text lends itself to being studied or used to ask somewhat good questions and developed somewhat good tasks according to the course objectives.	2	
	The text doesn't lend itself to being studied or used to ask good questions and developed good tasks according to the course objectives.	1	
Variety and Novelty	The text contains very fresh and novel data in an appealing way.	3	
	The text contains somewhat fresh and novel data.	2	
	The text doesn't contain somewhat fresh and novel data.	1	
Text challenge	The text is very challenging to students' intelligence without making unreasonable linguistic demands.	3	
	The text is somewhat challenging to students' intelligence without making unreasonable linguistic demands.	2	
	The text is not challenging to students' intelligence without making unreasonable linguistic demands.	1	
Natural language	The written language is very representative of the natural usage of T2. The text is realistic and genuine.	3	
	The written language is somewhat representative of the natural usage of T2. It has been partially distorted.	2	
	The written language is not representative of the natural usage of T2. It has been distorted.	1	

*Designed by Olivares, C & Barrantes, L. (2012). with the contribution from the criteria stated by Nuttall (1996) and Lee (1995).*

## V References

- Alderson, J.C. (2000). *Assessing reading*. Cambridge, C.U.P.
- Anderson, N.J. (1999). *Exploring second language reading – Issues and strategies*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle.
- Berardo, S. (2006). *The use of authentic materials in the teaching of reading*. The Reading Matrix. Vol. 6, No. 2, September 2006.

- Breen, M.P. (1985). *Authenticity in the language classroom*. Applied Linguistics. P60-70.
- Browne, M. Neil & Stuart M. Keeley. (2007). *Asking the right questions: A guide to critical thinking*. 8th edition.
- Clarke, D. (1990). *Communicative theory and its influence on materials production*. *Language Teaching* 25/1, pp. 73-86
- Griffiths, G. & Keohane, K. (2000). *Personalizing language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guariento, W. & Morley, J. (2001). *Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom*. *ELT Journal* 55 (4), pp. 347-353.
- Harmer, J. (1998). *How to teach English*. Harlow: Longman.
- Hess, N. (2001). *Teaching large multilevel classes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kilickaya, F. (2004). *Authentic material and cultural content in EFL classrooms*. The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. X. No. 7, July 2004. <http://iteslj.org/>
- Little, D. (2004) *Democracy, discourse and learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom*. *Utbildning & Demokrati* 13 (3), 106-126.
- Lund, S. (1992). *Giving your courses a dose of reality*. *ELT Forum* 3 pp.10-15
- Macdonald, M., Badger, R. & White, G. (2000). *The real thing? : Authenticity and academic listening*. English for Specific Purposes.
- McKay, S. (2000). *Teaching English as an international language: Implications for cultural materials in the classroom*. *TESOL Journal*, 9(4).
- Neikova, M. (2005).
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English language teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Peacock, M. (1997). *The effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners in English Language Teaching Journal* 51.
- Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2008). *The miniature guide to critical thinking concepts and tools*. Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.
- Reinders, H. (2010). *Towards classroom pedagogy for learner autonomy: A framework of independent language learning skills*. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* Vol 35, 5, August 2010. Middlesex University.
- Sanderson, P. (1999). *Using newspapers in the classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Senior, R. (2005). *Authentic responses to authentic materials in English teaching professional*.
- Shortall, T. (2001). *Distinctions and dichotomies: Artificial and authentic. English teaching professional*.
- Stuart, G., & Nocon, H. (1996). *Second culture acquisition: Ethnography in the foreign language classroom*. *The Modern Language Journal* 80 (4).
- Sullivan J. (2012). *How does Bloom's taxonomy relate to critical thinking information?* |eHow.com [http://www.ehow.com/about\\_6233382\\_bloom\\_s-relate-critical-thinking-information\\_.html#ixzz2DcsIon3m](http://www.ehow.com/about_6233382_bloom_s-relate-critical-thinking-information_.html#ixzz2DcsIon3m)
- Widdowson, H. (1990). *Aspects of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press



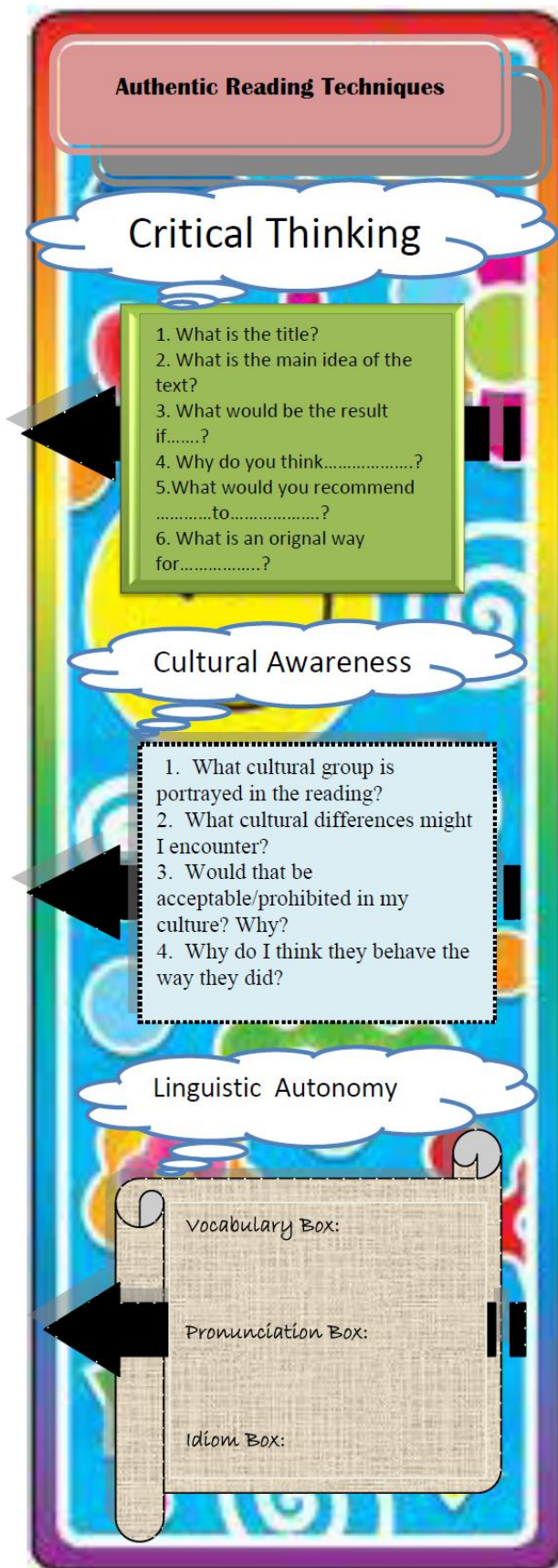
**1<sup>st</sup> Author's biography**

Cinthya Olivares Garita holds a Licentiate's degree in Applied Linguistics in English and a Master's degree in Second Languages and Culture from Universidad Nacional. She is currently working at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension in the English teaching major and the Associate's program in English. She has worked for thirteen years teaching students of all levels: primary, secondary and university. She has also worked for private and public institutions, participated in national and international conferences for teachers and been a trainer of several courses for in-service MEP teachers. She is currently one of the developers of CI-UNA (Centro de Idiomas Universidad Nacional) language program at SRB and the coordinator of CONLA UNA 2013.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Author's biography**

Lena Barrantes Elizondo holds a master's degree in Second Languages and Culture from Universidad Nacional. During her twelve years of teaching experience, she has taught in different areas. She has taught for the Ministry of Public Education as a primary school teacher and a teachers' trainer for in-service teachers. She is currently a professor at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension in the English teaching major and the Associate's Program in English, and coordinator of different projects in this institution.

Appendix 1 Authentic Reading Techniques Bookmark



Appendix 2: Reading Sample 1

# Authentic Reading Techniques

## E-mails: a sign of progress or of laziness?

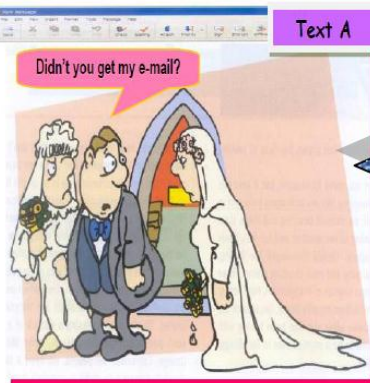
Ten years ago, e-mails were considered a very sophisticated method of communication. Nowadays, however, e-mail messaging has become a normal way of communicating, not only between working people but also between people at home. Text messaging and chatting on a mobile phone are still the most frequent methods of communication among teenagers, but e-mails are fast becoming more and more common in this age group.

This little flying yellow envelope on the screen changed the world of communication.

Words like stamps, post office or postman no longer belong to a teenager's vocabulary. New words are born: *e-mail, sent items, received items, recipient, attachment...* and symbols too. These words have replaced the old ones. Your pen friend, or should we say key pal, is only a click away.

Nevertheless, not everyone approves of the spread of e-mails. Teachers are in two minds. On the one hand, it is good that students spend a lot more of their free time exchanging e-mails and as a result get more practice at writing. On the other hand, there is very little attention to correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. What is more, e-mails tend to be very sloppy. Many older people, who are more used to formal business letters, feel also that the style of writing is too informal. For instance, it is quite common to use first names even though one has never met the person.

I would say that e-mails are a good invention although they will probably never replace either telephone calls or ordinary letters. As far as I am concerned, they are just another, very efficient, means of communication.



### Critical Thinking

1. What is the title?
2. What is the main idea of the text?
3. What would be the result if teenagers stopped using e-mails?
4. Why do you think teenagers use a phone code to text messages?
5. What would you recommend teenagers to improve oral communication?
6. What is an original way for teenagers to communicate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

### Cultural Awareness

1. What cultural group is portrayed in the reading?
2. What cultural differences might I encounter?
3. Would that be acceptable/prohibited in my culture? Why?
4. Why do I think they behave the way they did?

## Text Messaging :- ) or :- ( ?



The latest thing among British teenagers is text-messaging - sending little e-mails by phone to their friends.

96% of British students under 16 who have a mobile phone use their phones to send text messaging. "Texting" is great for teenagers who have pay-as-you-go phones because it's cheaper and more private than making calls. The craze has also produced its own language: **GR8 2CU** (Great to see you); **RUOK** (Are you Okay?); **THX** (Thanks); **:-** (No) and **:'** (I'm sad)... Nosy parents or teachers can't understand it. For most adults this language is a code that only teenagers can handle. "Text messaging is cheaper so I use it a lot more than phoning," says Rachel. "The coolest thing is that my parents can't read my messages. Isn't that XLNT and GR8? :-)"

Source: *In Focus and Cool Zone* (adapted)

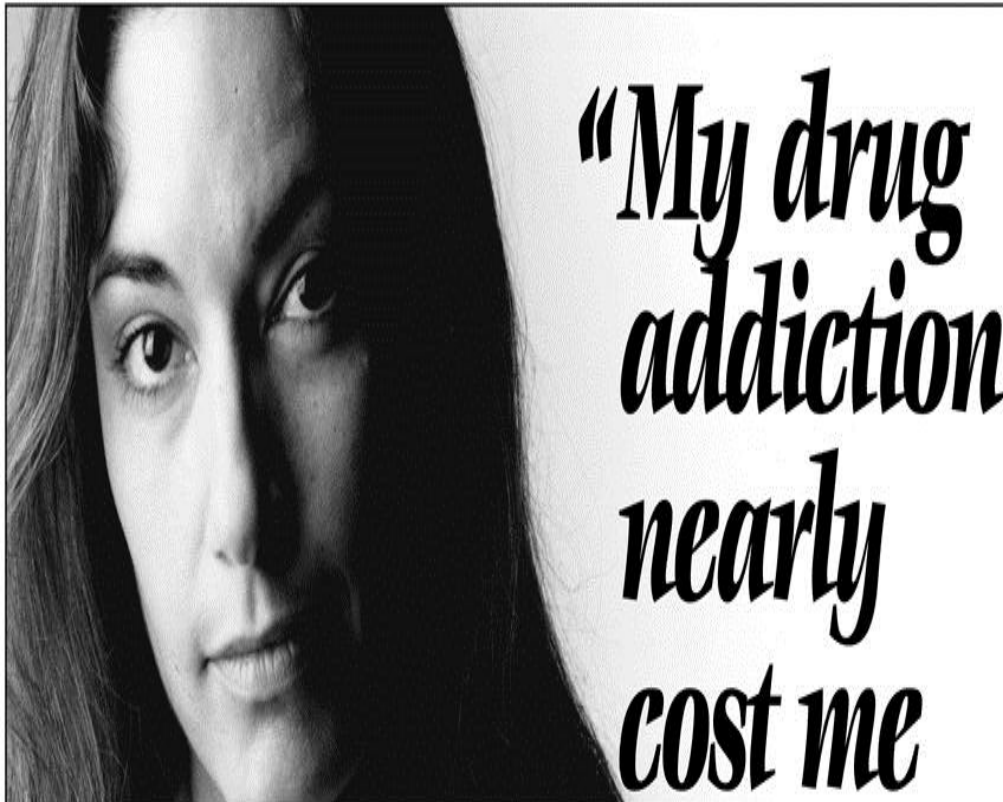
### Linguistic Autonomy

Vocabulary Box:

Pronunciation Box:

Idiom Box:

Appendix 3: Reading Sample 2



**“My drug addiction nearly cost me my child.”**

“My daughter needed me and I was too drugged to care,” recalls Michelle, a 25 year old single mom.

She couldn't live with her addiction to methamphetamines and still be a good mom. After violently losing control with her daughter at the grocery store, the manager called the police. Michelle thought she had lost her child.

Michelle called the HelpLine. She received assistance with child care, parenting classes and spent time in an intensive drug treatment program. “I volunteer now to help other people who are hurting their kids with their addictions.”

The Santa Barbara organizations that helped Michelle care for her daughter are all a part of our county's *United Way Network for Caring*. It makes a real difference in local people's lives. Won't you help us help others?

*Your United Way. Real lives. Positive solutions.*



Santa Barbara County's  
**United Way**  
www.unitedwaysb.org

This advertisement was made possible by Mark Oliver, Inc., and photographer Eliot Crowley.

**Authentic Reading Techniques**

**Critical Thinking**

1. What is the title?
2. What is the main idea of the text?
3. What would be the result if.....?
4. Why do you think.....?
5. What would you recommend .....to.....?
6. What is an original way for.....?

**Cultural Awareness**

1. What cultural group is portrayed in the reading?
2. What cultural differences might I encounter?
3. Would that be acceptable/prohibited in my culture? Why?
4. Why do I think they behave the way they did?

**Linguistic Autonomy**

Vocabulary Box:

Pronunciation Box:

Idiom Box: