

READING: STRUCTURE & STRATEGY, BOOK 1

Arturo Zentella, Elvia Campuzano, Patrick Ahern, and James Taylor. Mexico: Longman, 1982.

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It is pleasantly comforting to find a book especially designed for the UNAM's Preparatoria system in which the authors' intention is to make use of the students' "intelligence" and "knowledge of the world" as the authors of Reading: Structure & Strategy write in their introduction.

I gather from the introduction, that this is the first of a set of three books to be used in each year of the Preparatoria. It is also stated in the introduction, that the objectives in the teaching of foreign languages in the Prepa system cover grammatical structures and reading comprehension strategies, and compared with other books now on the market this seems to be a valid attempt to really include reading strategies in classroom activities starting in the first year of Prepa.

The organization of the course seems viable and takes a practical approach. The layout is attractive and coheres with the authors' "philosophy" of giving the students intelligent choices in themes and presentation.

There is no specific methodology suggested to deal with the grammar structures and they are presented eclectically enough as to let the Prepa teachers follow their intuition as to how to present, teach or review the material to incorporate the four abilities in learning a language.

The approach recommended for the reading passages should include more background information about the different reading styles. This approach is very new to some teachers, and the authors should state more clearly that step-by-step rules to follow the exercise are

not enough. Teachers should venture into new methodologies to really take advantage of the knowledge the students already have. There is also a mention of the use of the mother tongue in class, but the recommendation sounds compromising instead of encouraging; the mother tongue is, most of the time in reading comprehension, the tool to trigger the students' anticipation and help them profit from what they are going to read.

There are two things that make me wonder and frown. First, are the reading passages authentic? They seem to me too carefully well written to be authentic. I hope authentic sources are included in the following books.

The other problem is the selection of exercises when dealing with the passages. These are mostly limited to "true-false" items, and some could be answered without even bothering to read the text. The other choice are the open-questions at the end of the passage, but the answer requires not the comprehension of the passage but the scanning of it. Answers only need a name or a date or a part of a sentence that can be copied from the passage. A few multiple choice exercises are introduced with an unfortunate example on page 49:

Bears are a kind of

- A) flower
- B) animal
- C) tourist

Why unfortunate? There is a big photograph of a bear on the opposite page. Also, given the exercises that precede this particular item, it seems irrelevant for comprehension or acquisition of vocabulary. There is also a selection of context reference which should be included more profitably from the beginning of the book.

This book has its advantages, and it brings a somewhat new approach to language teaching in Prepas. The only valid evaluation, however, will come from the Preparatoria teachers and students once they have used the book.