UNIT 2   LEARNING AND TEACHING MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS

2..3.1 PRE-READING STAGE

Pre-reading activities get students ready to read the text and make the process of reading more comprehensible. They are used to "warm students up", arouse their interest and expectations, familiarize them with the topic and pre-teach the words students will need to really understand and enjoy the text. Furthermore they are useful to activate their prior knowledge (schemata) about the topic, to give them the background knowledge necessary to comprehend the text, to make them aware of the type of text they will be reading and the purpose(s) for reading. They also provide opportunities for group or collaborative work and for class discussion activities.

The following sample pre-reading activities can be easily used in CLIL classes. To make them clear I am going to consider a text that could be used by teachers of Information technology in CLIL classes. The following abridged text is taken from the "Technology" section of "The New York Times" website:

http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/01/does-computing-add-up-in-the-classroom/#more-1028

April 1, 2008, 7:40 pm

Does Computing Add Up in the Classroom?

By STEVE LOHR

[….] it would seem no surprise that the recent report by the National Mathematics Advisory Panel would include computer-based instruction among its recommendations to address the "mediocre level" of math achievement by American students.

But the champions of computing in the classroom have hailed the math panel report as an encouraging win for their side. It suggests, they say, that computing should be seen as a valuable tool in mainstream education, like math and science, in kindergarten through high school curriculums. [….]

The debate over the appropriate place of computing in grade schools and high schools echoes the debate in universities decades ago, when computers and software were initially seen as mere plumbing. And certainly not something worth of study in its own right? A department of computer science? Why not a department of slide rules?

But over time, computer science became a science of its own, and computing is regarded as a universal tool of all sciences and many social sciences, adding new powers of simulation and measurement to mathematics.

Below the university level, however, computing is far from that stature today. But the math panel report recommends well-designed computer instruction as a way to nurture greater fluency in math and understanding of math concepts, from drill and practice to programming with visual languages like LOGO, developed in the 1960s by Seymour Papert and others at M.I.T. and Bolt, Beranek and Newman, a research firm. [….]

But the progress is likely to be gradual. Myra Deister teaches both math and computer science at Sunny Hills High School in Fullerton, Calif. When she can, Ms. Deister says, she tries to use computing in her math classes. But math and computer science, she adds, are still viewed as separate worlds in most of the education community, and curriculums reflect the schism, with much of computer science education focused on competency in applications like word processing and spreadsheets.

A scarcity of resources, she said, is another issue. "I do feel that computer science really helps students understand mathematics," Ms. Deister said. "And I would use computers more in math, if I had access to a computer lab."

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES:

- **Asking students some "warm up" questions to set the context of the text.**

Example: What do you use the computer for? How often do you use it at school? Does it help you understand school subjects better?

- **Asking students to brainstorm ideas about the meaning of a title and eliciting their background knowledge.**

Example: The title of the text you are going to read is "Does Computing Add Up in the Classroom?". According to you what does the title mean? In your opinion can computing help you understand school subjects better and more easily? If yes, which subjects could take particularly advantage of computing?

- **Exploiting pictures to get a general idea of what the text will be about**

Example: Teachers can show a picture with some children in a computer laboratory and say: Look at the picture. What are the children doing? What school subject do you think they are studying? Can computing be useful in other subjects? Why?

- **Presenting new words or difficult words that are essential to the understanding of the text.** This can also be done by means of a brainstorming activity in which students are invited to call out words and concepts they associate with the key words or words provided by the teacher.

Example: Read the words written on the blackboard: panel - hailed - tool - mainstream - plumbing - tool - nurture - schism - spreadsheets …... Do you know what they mean? Then teachers explain the meaning of the unknown words. The choice of words can be bigger or smaller; it depends on the students' level.

Teachers can also ask: Considering the title of the article, which words do you expect to find in the text?

- **Writing a set of keywords from the text on the blackboard and asking students to predict the content.**

Example: Instead of giving the title of the text, teachers could write the following key-words on the blackboard: National Mathematics Advisory Panel, computer-based instruction, grade schools, high schools. Then they could ask: According to you what is the topic of the text?

- **Asking students to skim the text to find the theme or main idea and eliciting their related prior knowledge.**

Example: Read the text quickly. What is the main idea of the text? Do you know what "computing" means? What does "computer-base instruction" mean?

- **Asking them to skim the first paragraph for gist and then to predict.**

Example: Read the first paragraph quickly. According to **you** what is written in the rest of the text?

- **Exploiting students' knowledge of the author or text type to predict.** This technique is particularly useful in literary subjects.