Shaping the Way We Teach English: Successful Practices Around the World

Readings and Resources

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Module 1: Contextualizing Language

Module 1: Reading, Contextualizing Language
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Textbook vs. “Real World” Communication

A middle-aged man hurries into a department store, carrying a store bag. He sees a young, female clerk and stops her.

Man: I would like to return this shirt. It has got a button missing.
Clerk: You have got to go to Customer Service.
Man: Where’s that?
Clerk: It’s down this aisle at the back of the store.
Man: OK. Thanks.

This is a typical dialogue from an English textbook. Learners read the dialogue, learn the vocabulary, work on the grammar structure, and, perhaps, memorize the dialogue for performance. However, if this was an actual dialogue, it might sound more like this:

Man: I’d like ta return this shirt. ‘T’s gotta but’on missing.
Clerk: Ya’ hafta go back ta Customer Service.
Man: Where’s that?
Clerk: Down the aisle. Back of the store.
Man: OK. Thanks.

As we all know, part of understanding spoken language is recognizing pronunciation patterns. So if we understand the grammar, the vocabulary, and the pronunciation, do we understand the message? What else is happening in this situation? What other messages are the two participants sending to each other? The clerk knows that the man wants to return an unsatisfactory purchase. He learns that returns have to be made at Customer Service, which is at the back of the store. What other information is conveyed in a brief communication act like this?

What is the man’s tone (of voice)? Is he polite? Is he angry? Is he irritated? What is the clerk’s tone? Is she polite? Is she rude? Is she irritated? Has she had a bad day and her feet hurt? What is the man’s body language saying? What do you imagine the clerk’s facial expression is saying?

What cultural elements are present in this brief exchange?

What is Customer Service in this culture? What is the expected tone of voice and register that a male customer would use in talking to a female clerk in this culture? What is expected of the female clerk? What is the language and behavior expected in exchanges between older males and younger females in this culture? Is age or gender more important in making that decision? Does one make eye contact in this situation? How close / far away does one stand? What gestures are recognized as being meaningful? Native speakers of a language instinctively know the answers to all these questions and adjust their language and behavior accordingly. But what about the language learner?

Contextualizing Language

Language teaching, and learning, was once considered a relatively simple process. One taught basic grammar rules and structures, added vocabulary to the structures and expected students to learn the language. Some did. Many did not, but it wasn’t that important because they were unlikely to use it anyway. Today, the world is a different place. Given rapid global change and growing
interaction between countries and cultures, a learner does not know when he or she might be required to use a target language for personal or professional purposes. Along with this changing need has come the recognition that learning the linguistic elements of a language, while necessary, is not sufficient for accurate and appropriate language use, for developing communicative competence. Appropriate language use is learned through context.

It is now widely held that both language context and language, or linguistic, focus are necessary for efficient and effective learning. That is why the first two modules of this teacher education series deal with first, contextualizing language and second, building language awareness within that context.

Contextualization refers to meaningful language use for communicative purposes within a given situation or context. The rationale for this kind of approach is to demonstrate “real” world language use, how language is used by speakers of that language, and to help learners construct language in their learning environments, depending on (1) their purpose and, (2) the needs of a given situational context. Other reasons for contextualizing language are that

• It can help learners to understand the functions of language.
• It can assist learners in developing appropriate use of language.
• Learners can activate their own background knowledge to make the language learning more meaningful.
• It adds the cultural element, combining language and culture.
• The combination of all of the above can be motivating for both learners and teachers.

Language Construction

Part of contextualizing language is helping students learn how to construct language for a given situation. An effective process for constructing language in a classroom has both cognitive and social aspects. In the cognitive process, learners construct their own meaning or knowledge from the input they receive, input which will include information about the context or situation. The social aspect includes the idea of learners helping other learners to understand ideas and concepts, opportunities for which can be facilitated through group and pair work. Both aspects are important in setting up a constructive learning environment contextualizing language. And for both aspects, the learner is the center of the learning process, the one who constructs language based on situation, input, and purpose. One of the decisions a teacher must make concerns how much situational and cultural information to provide about the various factors in a given context beyond the linguistic information, i.e. information about participant roles, appropriate body language, register, expected behaviours, and so forth. How much is needed for appropriate language use and how much can the learners handle at their level of proficiency? As learners work on constructing language appropriate to a given context, some of the variables that need to be considered are:

• Communicators’ purpose,
• Roles and status of the participants in the communication event, which will include attention to register and tone, and
• Socially acceptable norms of behavior and interaction in the specific situation, which will include consideration of the topic of the communication, the medium, and the genre.

In the kind of learning environment described above, the teacher’s responsibility is 1) to provide useful, accurate, and comprehensible input, 2) to design language learning activities that facilitate language construction, and 3) to provide support for learners’ efforts whenever needed. How, then, can the teacher design this kind of learning environment? Contextualizing language in an active learning environment can be particularly difficult for the English teacher in a non-English setting, an EFL environment. In that environment, textbook language is often felt to be more accessible to both
Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

learners and teachers than contextualized language. However, there are teaching strategies that can be used quite well in an EFL situation. The teacher can adjust the amount of contextual information in the input based on his or her own comfort level.

**Contextualizing Language through Content**

Contextualizing language is a process that is best, or at least most easily, organized around content, especially in an EFL environment. This can be done through a content-based curriculum, in which a subject is taught through the medium of English, or through a topic or theme-based curriculum. Using content is a good way to utilize what learners already know about a topic. The teacher presents new information in the context of known information, utilizing both linguistic and world knowledge. This creates a natural spiraling or reusing of language and information used in previous lessons, as previous material is reviewed and activated in presenting new material.

The content itself sets the language context, or provides information from which the teacher can set a language context. The next step is for teachers to choose authentic materials natural to that context, which would also be accessible to themselves and to their students. The materials, in turn, suggest authentic activities, meaning activities that require “real” communication. One of the most frequently used examples of this process is content related to travel, or the tourist industry, partly because content for this topic is accessible for both teachers and students.

Some examples of authentic materials and situations: Brochures written in English for tourists who visit the learners’ country or city; tourism web sites (written in English) about the country or city in English; several local hotels or restaurants who would be willing to take calls in English from students.

Activities that activate real world knowledge: In groups, learners make a list of all the businesses in their town that either depend on or are related in some way to tourism and /or a list of as many different jobs as they can think of in the local tourism industry. Learners can make a list of different communication events that a tourist visiting the city might have (checking into a hotel, going to a restaurant, etc.). Learners can prepare for the unit by visiting establishments that deal with visitors (any visitors, not just English-speaking ones) and make notes about language used, eye contact, body language, and other appropriate behaviors.

Spiraling (re-use or recycling of lesson content): The teacher can do a review of previously learned politeness language and language chunks, which might be used for dialogues in this new unit.

Linguistic focus: Introduction of more polite language structures using modals; travel-related vocabulary; perhaps appropriate telephone formulas, etc.

Communication events (tasks): Reading information on the Internet, making hotel / restaurant reservations, buying bus/plane/train tickets; asking for information, etc. Watching an English movie / video that includes some of these communication events and comparing appropriate behaviors in the target culture to notes about local behaviors (depending on the proficiency level of the students).

**Summary**

These are just a few ideas for contextualizing language in the classroom. Creative teachers can no doubt think of many more. In today’s world, there is a growing need to learn how to use language appropriately in context. Effective English language teachers treat language as a whole, integrated communication system and use that system as a “context” to facilitate their students’ learning.
List of Additional Readings and Resources


What is Metacognitive Awareness?

Metacognition is a term that was coined by Flavell in 1970 and there has been much debate over a suitable definition. In a language learning context this means knowing about oneself as a learner, in other words, the knowledge and self-awareness a learner has of their own language learning process, and is regarded as the key to successful language learning.

Metacognition and Secondary School Learners

What about metacognition and school learners? Research has shown that even quite young children possess a considerable degree of metacognitive knowledge. By the time they reach secondary school, basic skills have been mastered, they are in the early years of adolescence and, for most young people, there is a marked development of mental functioning, an increased self-awareness and a change from Piaget’s concrete operations to formal reasoning. Translated into classroom terms this means that our pupils are at a stage where we can encourage them to reflect critically on what they are doing and why, in order to plan and direct their own learning.

However, many teaching situations and teaching materials do not encourage this kind of reflection and therefore do not contribute to the development of metacognitive awareness, despite the fact that it is generally agreed that the learning purposes, strategies and the possibility of strategy transfer to other tasks must, at some point in the learning process, be made explicit to the learner. Learners should not be left to uncover the implicit without some kind of prompt or help. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the concerned, individual teacher to add this missing dimension.

My own classroom practice has shown that students are capable of understanding and benefit from being given information about classroom procedures. Furthermore, asked the right questions, they are capable of expressing an awareness about their own learning that they are rarely given credit for and this awareness can be developed. The kind of awareness or knowledge that learners do have about their learning concerns the comparative difficulty of different types of tasks, knowledge about themselves as learners and an awareness of the ways in which they generally operate strategically. What does not develop either as fast or as inevitably is the ability to use that knowledge spontaneously in pursuance of a cognitive goal.

Metacognitive Awareness in a Language Learning Context

In a language learning context I see metacognitive awareness as an umbrella term which incorporates the following areas. These overlap to some extent and all involve the development of positive attitudes, self-confidence and self-awareness.

a) Language awareness

The aim here is to stimulate students’ interest and curiosity about language “to challenge pupils to ask questions about language” (Hawkins 1984) in order to develop understanding of and knowledge about language in general, including the foreign language, the mother tongue and, if appropriate
and depending on the context, other languages. This would involve using metalanguage (the mother tongue or target language) for stating the aims of a lesson, for explaining the use of different classroom activities, for signposting the stages of a lesson, for giving classroom instructions, for describing language, for analysing language, for making comparisons to find similarities and differences between the L1 and L2 and for discovering rules.

b) Cognitive awareness
The main aim here is to help students understand why they are learning a foreign language at school and that in addition to linguistic outcomes, it also offers important personal, cognitive, cultural, affective and social gains. It involves explaining how they are going to learn a foreign language in class, the type of materials they are going to use and the activities they are going to do; getting them to think about how they learn, which strategies they use to help them to remember, to concentrate, to pay attention; how and when to review, how to evaluate and monitor their learning and to decide what they need to do next.

c) Social awareness
This will involve students in collaborative activities which, in some contexts, may involve a new understanding of how to behave in class, towards the teacher and towards each other; to establish a working consensus which will contribute towards building class, peer, teacher and individual respect; and to learn to interact and cooperate together in activities.

d) Cultural awareness
Girard’s (1991) definition of this important area “to develop understanding and openness towards others” would involve pupils in activities which would enable them to discover similarities and differences between themselves and other people and to see these in a positive light. The development of tolerance and positive attitudes to the foreign language culture and people will draw pupils away from a mono-cultural perspective and into a broader view of the world.

Why is the Development of Metacognitive Awareness Important?

As already stated, the development of metacognitive awareness is considered to be the key to successful learning.

Our students get lots of implicit practice in the classroom in experimenting with different cognitive strategies, for example tasks that get them to sort or classify, to compare, to match, to select, to predict, to guess, to sequence, etc., but most classroom situations and materials rarely inform students explicitly about why they are using certain strategies or get them to reflect on how they are learning. In other words, the metacognitive dimension is missing, so students are not helped to understand the significance of what they are doing. Although some published materials now include activities which get students to review what they have learnt, (see Sinclair and Ellis 1992) these are often in the form of self-tests or check lists which focus solely on the product or the linguistic content of a learning unit and not, in any way, on the processes involved. The emphasis here is “on learning something rather than on learning to learn” (Wenden 1987). The inclusion of simple instruments for self-assessment is also a welcome addition to published materials, but again these rarely encourage any reflection on the learning process and teacher’s books offer little support or guidance to the teacher on how to develop this important aspect of learning.

Research has shown (O’Malley et al., 1985, Ellis and Sinclair, 1989) that without the combination of metacognitive and cognitive strategy development learners are unlikely to be able to transfer strategies to other tasks. As O’Malley et al state, “Students without metacognitive approaches are es-
sentually learners without direction and ability to review their progress, accomplishments and future learning directions."

In other words, students need activities which incorporate reflection, thinking about what they are going to do and why, experimentation, doing a task and manipulating the language to achieve a goal, such as listen and colour, listen and draw, listen and sequence, etc., and further reflection, by asking such questions as What did I do? Why did I do it? How well did I do? What do I need to do next? In this way, the implicit becomes explicit — pupils become aware of what they are doing and why. We can assume that "the more informed (and aware) learners are about language and language learning the more effective they will be at managing their own learning and at language learning" (Ellis and Sinclair, op. cit).

A Methodology for Developing Metacognitive Awareness

I would like to propose a methodology for developing metacognitive awareness which could be applied to existing classroom contexts with little disruption. Most lessons consist, more or less, of three principal stages: revision and presentation of language items, and planning and preparation for an activity; doing an activity or a task to practise the language items and to develop skills areas; further practice to consolidate, extend and review language, perhaps in a different context and/or to produce an outcome such as a book, a poster, a completed worksheet and so on. Applied to the skills areas, for example, listening, these stages are usually referred to as pre-, while and post-listening. These stages provide the teacher with a framework in which to incorporate reflection, experimentation and further reflection, as mentioned above, representing the on-going cyclical nature of learning in which children plan, do and review. This general strategy for learning is important because it can be used as a framework for learning any subject, including language learning.

A Methodology for Developing Metacognitive Awareness

| stage 1 >> stage 2 >> stage 3 |
| pre-listening >> while-listening >> post-listening |
| reflection >> experimentation >> further reflection |

In order to do this, teachers will need to expand their role (Wenden 1985) by taking on a guiding, questioning role which will involve informing students about language learning and what they are doing and how they are going to do it. He or she can do this by prompting, modelling questions and strategies, demonstrating, discussing learning and helping students reflect on what they have done, how they did it and how well they did. This is an approach I have used regularly with students in France. Working in this way with beginner or low level learners naturally requires the use of the mother tongue and a little extra time. The extra time can easily be found if the teacher is prepared to take a few minutes away from the content of the foreign language lesson to focus on the process.

Getting students to focus on the process of what they do may be a new experience for many. At first their replies to questions will be vague and they will need to be pushed to think and justify their responses. Such an approach needs to be built up gradually over a period of time but, little by little, students will become more aware of the foreign language learning process and of themselves as...
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language learners, more efficient at thinking for themselves and much more actively and personally involved in their own learning.

**Asking the Right Questions**

Reference has been made to the teacher’s expanded role, which includes taking on a questioning role. What are the right questions to ask to encourage active and critical reflection? My experience has shown that the questions we ask about learning have to be extremely clear and directly related to a learning experience. We are inviting students to think about an aspect of their learning that is abstract and, for most, will be new. Unless the questions are well-formulated and concrete, in accessible language, the students will be confused and unable to reply in a way that helps them, or their teacher, become aware of their learning processes. A good question, then, must be probing and an invitation to think, so that it makes pupils justify their responses, it must focus their attention and encourage observation, invite enquiry and stimulate, because it is open-ended. It should be productive and seek a response and generate more questions. Below are some examples of the type of questions teachers could ask in order to develop cognitive awareness:

* How do you remember words?
* What helped you understand the words in the story?
* What do we need to know to do the task?
* How can we find out?
* What have we done today? Why?
* How did we do it?
* How well did you do?
* What do you need to revise? Why?
* What are you going to do next? Why?
* What did you do if you didn’t understand?
* How did you check your work?
* How did you work out the answers?

These questions can be described as oral prompts which could be integrated into a learning conversation to encourage the learner to reflect and articulate. Written questions, guided journals, or a letter to a teacher are other techniques that can be used.

**Applying the ‘Plan-Do-Review’ Strategy**

It is the responsibility of the teacher to create a context and purpose for learning, and I would like to demonstrate an example of how I applied the ‘plan-do-review’ strategy with a class of 12-13-year-olds at the recently opened Young Learners Centre at the British Council in Paris.

I chose a storybook called *Ketchup on Your Cornflakes* by Nick Sharratt, which, like any good storybook, provides a flexible resource that can be used with a variety of pupils of different ages and levels.
Although at first glance the book looks simplistic, the use of the split page technique allows many amusing and crazy combinations of words and images based on the structure 'Do you like (ketchup on your cornflakes)? Do you like (custard on your apple pie)?' and so on.

Linguistically, it provides an ideal context for introducing and revising the question Do you like ..., related vocabulary and prepositions. Grammatically, in Michael Lewis's terms, pupils are provided with a 'pattern' (Do you like ...) which allows them to generate all kinds of other questions. However, it goes further than the basic question-form Do you like cornflakes / apple pie? as it requires pupils to think about combinations of things that are both grammatically and culturally appropriate: Do you like custard on your apple pie? as opposed to Do you like custard on your chips?

The 'plan' and 'do' stages involved revision and practice of the question Do you like ..., prepositions and vocabulary, and the reading aloud of the storybook when pupils were invited to turn pages of their own choice to create strange and unexpected combinations.

The review and extension stage involved making a book using the same basic idea. In order to do this, the pupils first analysed the text and structure of the book. By questioning the pupils (How is the book structured? Where's the text? Where are the illustrations? What's on the right / left page? How is the text divided, What type of word is this? How does the text begin? How does the text end? What about the text in the middle?), we created a model on the board of how the book was constructed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you like + noun</th>
<th>illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>preposition + your + noun</td>
<td>illustration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coloured paper was distributed and collated, and the pupils started to think about their own combinations of words and images, and began drafting the first version of their books. Suggestions were tried out, evaluated, selected or rejected, and modified and corrected as necessary. Pupils then produced the final version of their book. The next step was to try the books out on their classmates and invite them to make crazy combinations. (Fig. 5) The 'plan-do-review' strategy provided a framework for the exploitation of Ketchup on Your Cornflakes enabling the development of the different aspects of metacognitive awareness as in Fig. 1.

The 'plan-do-review' strategy can be applied in a way that it does not disrupt classroom procedures or interfere with the syllabus. The extra time needed to question pupils or to get them to complete a questionnaire is considered a necessary and worthwhile investment. It also allows important questions to be modelled, so pupils will be able to ask themselves these independently on other occasions.
Module 2: Building Language Awareness

But does developing metacognitive awareness make our pupils better foreign language learners? This I cannot say as I have never had the opportunity to set up a controlled study and a great deal of research still needs to be done to find out the rate at which a learner gains more self-awareness of their own learning process. What I do know and have observed is that students develop a greater understanding of themselves as language learners, become more actively and personally involved in the learning process, more confident, more curious and ask more questions, and develop strong motivation and positive attitudes towards language learning. These I consider to be valuable and worthwhile outcomes.

To conclude, I would hope that the teaching profession will move to a position where there is a recognition of the benefits of and a purposeful move towards the development of metacognitive awareness, so that this missing dimension is added to day-to-day classroom procedures of classroom management and lesson planning. Teachers need to reflect on the different aspects of metacognition, so they are integrated into lessons and developed as naturally and as systematically as putting up an umbrella when it rains! (Fig. 6)

References


List of Additional Readings and Resources


Module 3 Reading A, Integrated Skills in the ESL / EFL Classroom (ERIC Digest #EDO-FL-01-05)

Author: Rebecca Oxford, University of Maryland


One image for teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL / EFL) is that of a tapestry. The tapestry is woven from many strands, such as the characteristics of the teacher, the learner, the setting, and the relevant languages (i.e., English and the native languages of the learners and the teacher). For the instructional loom to produce a large, strong, beautiful, colorful tapestry, all of these strands must be interwoven in positive ways. For example, the instructor’s teaching style must address the learning style of the learner, the learner must be motivated, and the setting must provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of the language. However, if the strands are not woven together effectively, the instructional loom is likely to produce something small, weak, ragged, and pale—not recognizable as a tapestry at all.

In addition to the four strands mentioned above—teacher, learner, setting, and relevant languages—other important strands exist in the tapestry. In a practical sense, one of the most crucial of these strands consists of the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This strand also includes associated or related skills such as knowledge of vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. The skill strand of the tapestry leads to optimal ESL / EFL communication when the skills are interwoven during instruction. This is known as the integrated-skill approach.

If this weaving together does not occur, the strand consists merely of discrete, segregated skills—parallel threads that do not touch, support, or interact with each other. This is sometimes known as the segregated-skill approach. Another title for this mode of instruction is the language-based approach, because the language itself is the focus of instruction (language for language’s sake). In this approach, the emphasis is not on learning for authentic communication.

By examining segregated-skill instruction, we can see the advantages of integrating the skills and move toward improving teaching for English language learners.

Segregated-Skill Instruction

In the segregated-skill approach, the mastery of discrete language skills such as reading and speaking is seen as the key to successful learning, and language learning is typically separate from content learning (Mohan, 1986). This is contrary to the integrated way that people use language skills in normal communication, and it clashes with the direction in which language teaching experts have been moving in recent years.

Skill segregation is reflected in traditional ESL / EFL programs that offer classes focusing on segregated language skills. Why do they offer such classes? Perhaps teachers and administrators think it is logistically easier to present courses on writing divorced from speaking, or on listening isolated from reading. They may believe that it is instructionally impossible to concentrate on more than one skill at a time.

Even if it were possible to fully develop one or two skills in the absence of all the others, such an approach would not ensure adequate preparation for later success in academic communication, career-related language use, or everyday interaction in the language. An extreme example is the grammar-translation method, which teaches students to analyze grammar and to translate (usually
in writing) from one language to another. This method restricts language learning to a very narrow, noncommunicative range that does not prepare students to use the language in everyday life.

Frequently, segregated-skill ESL / EFL classes present instruction in terms of skill-linked learning strategies: reading strategies, listening strategies, speaking strategies, and writing strategies (see Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). Learning strategies are strategies that students employ, most often consciously, to improve their learning. Examples are guessing meaning based on context, breaking a sentence or word down into parts to understand the meaning, and practicing the language with someone else.

Very frequently, experts demonstrate strategies as though they were linked to only one particular skill, such as reading or writing (e.g., Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). However, it can be confusing or misleading to believe that a given strategy is associated with only one specific language skill. Many strategies, such as paying selective attention, self-evaluating, asking questions, analyzing, synthesizing, planning, and predicting, are applicable across skill areas (see Oxford, 1990). Common strategies help weave the skills together. Teaching students to improve their learning strategies in one skill area can often enhance performance in all language skills (Oxford, 1996).

Fortunately, in many instances where an ESL or EFL course is labeled by a single skill, the segregation of language skills might be only partial or even illusory. If the teacher is creative, a course bearing a discrete-skill title might actually involve multiple, integrated skills. For example, in a course on intermediate reading, the teacher probably gives all of the directions orally in English, thus causing students to use their listening ability to understand the assignment. In this course, students might discuss their readings, thus employing speaking and listening skills and certain associated skills, such as pronunciation, syntax, and social usage. Students might be asked to summarize or analyze readings in written form, thus activating their writing skills. In a real sense, then, some courses that are labeled according to one specific skill might actually reflect an integrated-skill approach after all.

The same can be said for ESL / EFL textbooks. A particular series might highlight certain skills in one book or another, but all the language skills might nevertheless be present in the tasks in each book. In this way, students have the benefit of practicing all the language skills in an integrated, natural, communicative way, even if one skill is the main focus of a given volume.

In contrast to segregated-skill instruction, both actual and apparent, there are at least two forms of instruction that are clearly oriented toward integrating the skills.

**Two Forms of Integrated-Skill Instruction**

Two types of integrated-skill instruction are content-based language instruction and task-based instruction. The first of these emphasizes learning content through language, while the second stresses doing tasks that require communicative language use. Both of these benefit from a diverse range of materials, textbooks, and technologies for the ESL or EFL classroom.

Content-Based Instruction. In content-based instruction, students practice all the language skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion while learning content such as science, mathematics, and social studies. Content-based language instruction is valuable at all levels of proficiency, but the nature of the content might differ by proficiency level. For beginners, the content often involves basic social and interpersonal communication skills, but past the beginning level, the content can become increasingly academic and complex. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA),
created by Chamot and O’Malley (1994) shows how language learning strategies can be integrated into the simultaneous learning of content and language.

At least three general models of content-based language instruction exist: theme-based, adjunct, and sheltered (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). The theme-based model integrates the language skills into the study of a theme (e.g., urban violence, cross-cultural differences in marriage practices, natural wonders of the world, or a broad topic such as change). The theme must be very interesting to students and must allow a wide variety of language skills to be practiced, always in the service of communicating about the theme. This is the most useful and widespread form of content-based instruction today, and it is found in many innovative ESL and EFL textbooks. In the adjunct model, language and content courses are taught separately but are carefully coordinated. In the sheltered model, the subject matter is taught in simplified English tailored to students’ English proficiency level.

Task-Based Instruction. In task-based instruction, students participate in communicative tasks in English. Tasks are defined as activities that can stand alone as fundamental units and that require comprehending, producing, manipulating, or interacting in authentic language while attention is principally paid to meaning rather than form (Nunan, 1989).

The task-based model is beginning to influence the measurement of learning strategies, not just the teaching of ESL and EFL. In task-based instruction, basic pair work and group work are often used to increase student interaction and collaboration. For instance, students work together to write and edit a class newspaper, develop a television commercial, enact scenes from a play, or take part in other joint tasks. More structured cooperative learning formats can also be used in task-based instruction. Task-based instruction is relevant to all levels of language proficiency, but the nature of the task varies from one level to the other. Tasks become increasingly complex at higher proficiency levels. For instance, beginners might be asked to introduce each other and share one item of information about each other. More advanced students might do more intricate and demanding tasks, such as taking a public opinion poll at school, the university, or a shopping mall.

Advantages of the Integrated-Skill Approach

The integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. Moreover, this approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. This approach allows teachers to track students’ progress in multiple skills at the same time. Integrating the language skills also promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms. Finally, the integrated-skill approach, whether found in content-based or task-based language instruction or some hybrid form, can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.

Integrating the Language Skills

In order to integrate the language skills in ESL / EFL instruction, teachers should consider taking these steps:

• Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom (e.g., content-based, task-based, or a combination).
• Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated.
Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

• Choose instructional materials, textbooks, and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking, and writing, as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary, and so on.
• Even if a given course is labeled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate tasks.
• Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills.

Conclusion

With careful reflection and planning, any teacher can integrate the language skills and strengthen the tapestry of language teaching and learning. When the tapestry is woven well, learners can use English effectively for communication.

References


Surveys provide your English language learners with a real reason to communicate with everyone in their mainstream class. They learn how to ask questions and acquire new content area vocabulary. Classmates become involved in your newcomers’ second language acquisition. Oral English and social skills are further developed when ELLs report their results to their cooperative group.

Taking surveys gives your students practice in the following areas:
- acquisition and use of content area vocabulary
- preparation of a survey
- interaction and negotiation of meaning with English-speaking peers
- construction of oral questions
- construction of a chart synthesizing information
- record information accurately

1. Combine your survey assignment with a content area lesson. Break your students into cooperative groups. Assign what you normally would to the group but add a survey piece for your ELLs. For example, if your class is studying the rain forest, students in cooperative groups may be each studying a different kind of rain forest animal. They might be required to divide the research on the animal among the members of the group. The newcomer could be assigned a survey about “favorite rain forest animals.” A newcomer does not need to ask survey questions that require complicated answers. For example, a questionnaire requiring “yes” “no” or one-word responses could be used with beginners.

2. Develop the vocabulary needed for the survey. Your second language learners should develop the questions with the aid of their group.

3. Give each ELL a clipboard, a pencil, and the survey form responses within their cooperative group.

4. If your survey fits, download blank survey form. Explain to students that only one name goes in each box. The person interviewed writes their name in the box above their response.

5. Have classmates take newcomers on a short trip around your school to find people to interview. This gives them practice so that they can go back to their classrooms and survey members of all of the cooperative groups.

6. Students then bring their completed surveys back to their cooperative group and report the results. Review expressions such as “more than,” “less than,” “the most,” and “the least.”

7. There are several ways this information can be used. Students can:
- write statements or answer questions about their survey
- make an individual chart of their responses
- combine their answers and construct a chart
List of Additional Readings and Resources


Module 4: Pairwork / Groupwork

Module 4 Reading A, Group Work vs. Whole-class Activities
Author: Simon Andrewes


Overview

Group and pair work (henceforth group work) are so much a part of our everyday teaching routine that we hardly pause to think before partitioning the class to tackle some particular communicative task. But group work may not always be the best option. There will be a time and a place for whole-class activities in the English language classroom, just as there's a time and a place for group and pair work.

In Praise of Group Work

Group work came into the standard EFL teaching repertoire with communicative methodologies in the 1970s. At that time, studies of contemporary foreign language classes revealed that as much as 80% of lesson time consisted of the teacher talking to (at) the students. In a class of, say, 30 students, it is evident that the learner hardly got a chance to practice the language. Teacher Talking Time (TTT) became taboo and ways were devised to stamp it out and train the students to actually perform in the language they were learning.

Group work was thus introduced into the EFL repertoire to come to grips with a particular problem. Group work made it possible for the teacher to devote more time to the students' oral production, which perhaps before had not been a priority of the foreign language classroom. Thanks to group work, less confident students get the chance to put their knowledge of the new language into practice in a non-threatening environment, away from the critical eye and ear of the teacher. Instead of being dependent on the teacher, students get used to helping and learning from each other. Meanwhile, the teacher is left free to discreetly monitor progress and give help, advice and encouragement where and when it is needed.

In Praise of Whole Class Discussion

An important aspect of whole-class discussion is the welding together of the whole group and the camaraderie that comes about when a whole group works together towards a common goal. Moreover, there is diversity in numbers; the larger the group, the more variety there is in the ideas, opinions and experiences which can contribute to the learning process. This can stimulate a greater involvement in each member of the class. Furthermore, whole class discussion is likely to be content based, rather than form based, encouraging fluency and a more memorable and meaningful exchange among the participants. It might also be more appropriate for the introverted and reflective learner. Finally, if we are talking about classes of 15 students or so, there are likely to be many opportunities of letting the whole class function as a single unit instead of dividing it into groups.

The two techniques can go hand in hand. After a session of group work, a whole-class feedback phase will give cohesion to the learning process. Ideally, the group work that has gone before will ensure that everyone has something to say, and also a reason for listening. Having "rehearsed" in a more intimate context beforehand, students may face the whole class with more confidence in their ability to handle the target language.
Tact and Sensitivity

Dealing with whole-class discussions requires the experience and sensitivity to strike the right balance between neutrality and commitment, the tact to deal with explosive situations and domineering students, the knowledge and the analytic mind demanded by the topic under discussion, and the diplomacy to ensure a fair discussion with maximum participation.

Dealing with group work demands just as much tact and sensitivity. The teacher may have to decide whether to intervene to bring an enthusiastic discussion onto a more linguistically fruitful path, or to stay in the background to allow the students to make their own discoveries about the language and the best way to learn it. Should groups be of mixed ability, so the more able language learners help the weaker ones, or would same-ability groups be preferable, so that faster learners can progress at their own pace, while the teacher gives extra help to individual learners in the slower groups?

Repertoire

Like any kind of praxis, group work can lose its meaning if it is handled in an automatic and unthinking way. It was developed under particular circumstances to solve a particular problem and it is not per se intrinsically better than any other technique. No technique is the panacea for all our teaching problems and its value should be reviewed from time to time.

The article on this site about repertoire demonstrates the point clearly. We are advised to take a regular look at the techniques we are using and, if one, such as whole-class discussion activities for example, has fallen out of our active repertoire, we should ask ourselves: Is there a good reason for this? It worked before; can it work again?

Although we build up a repertoire of tried and tested techniques and we cannot be constantly ‘reinventing the wheel’, we also need to be wary of unimaginative and ritualistic routine. Just as old numbers from our past teaching praxis may be found to have a value, parts of our current repertoire may prove to have none. So from time to time it is worth putting our group work practice under scrutiny and asking ourselves the same question: Is there a good reason for doing this? Badly handled group work can be as detrimental for the learning process as any other inappropriate technique.

Variety Adds Spice to the Classroom

It is generally recognized today that individual learners have different learning styles, strategies and preferences. It is also generally accepted that to be effective lessons need a change of pace and focus to maintain the concentration of the learners. For both these reasons it is important that we teachers have as wide and flexible repertoire. And for this reason, asked to choose between group work and whole class activities, my inclination is to say: Both!
Small group work has been a feature of ESL teaching since the mid-1970s; it has to some extent been overtaken in recent years by a general interest in cooperative learning. Cooperative learning stems primarily from the work of Kagan, D. W. and R. T. Johnson, and Slavin; teachers who are interested in knowing more about this approach are urged to look at their published work. (See References at the end of this guide.) Although definitions of cooperative learning vary, most would agree on three aspects:

1. Cooperative learning requires students in small groups, usually heterogeneous groups, to perform a collaborative task. That is, they have to work together to accomplish a common purpose: simply having a discussion or doing a homework assignment, for example, does not qualify as performing a collaborative task. This notion of a collaborative enterprise is key to this approach.

2. Cooperative tasks are typically short-term efforts, frequently tasks that can be accomplished in a single class period (though long-term tasks are also possible). When using a cooperative approach, many teachers impose a time limit on the activity because it helps students to structure their work.

3. Cooperative activities always have a definite outcome or product. This may take the form of a report to the whole class or, in the case of a jigsaw activity, the sharing of information with members of other groups. Whatever its form, the outcome is specified at the outset, and all of the group’s effort is directed toward its achievement.

A Rationale

There are many reasons why the cooperative approach has attracted so much attention, and there are many reasons why it is especially suitable for LEP students who crave opportunities to practice the language in a content-relevant fashion. Here are five.

1. Interaction. Cooperative learning requires students, and to some extent teachers and students, to interact. This means that students have more time than is customary to talk to each other and, more to the point, to talk to each other about topics of real interest to them. In the process, they learn the language of polite interruption, they learn how to express a point of view in a relatively short period of time, and they learn how to listen. Therefore, students need to be reminded often that they must contribute to the general effort, listen to each other, help a teammate who asks for help, and turn to the teacher only as a last resort.

2. Interdependence. Since the students are working together to accomplish a common objective, they learn to depend on each other. Typically, the group dynamic is such that each member assumes a slightly different role, and the collective enterprise is successful only to the extent that each performs her role successfully. Among other things, in the process, they receive feedback on their output in a comparatively nonthreatening way, and they hear classmates model the language and use it purposefully. Learning to act interdependently is also beneficial beyond the classroom in the workplace, where many jobs use a team approach.
3. **Processing.** Throughout, the students process language that is directly related to achievement in the content area. In other words, they gradually build confidence in the use of language, specifically academic language (CALP—see C-ESL Guide No. 1), that is needed for success in subsequent learning, while also learning the language of social interaction that goes along with it. Unless they develop the capacity to seek help, raise questions, express doubt, disagree, paraphrase, and negotiate—skills that are naturally developed in cooperative activities—they are unlikely to be as successful as they can be in academic settings.

4. **Competitiveness.** Most practitioners of cooperative techniques see their uncompetitive nature as being one of their chief virtues. The line many educators take is essentially that U.S. education is too individualistic and competitive, that that tendency is particularly problematic for LEP students, and that activities that engender a collaborative spirit are more likely to support students’ learning by widening the sources of input and deepening the individual’s commitment to the process. While the whole notion of study groups, quality circles, and the like for LEP students is compelling, it should also be noted that cooperative learning does not eliminate competition entirely: though individual competition is mediated by group participation, many cooperative activities still involve competition among groups.

5. **Accountability.** While the focus in all of this is the group, the fact is that no group can function until its members’ roles are in some fashion differentiated. In cooperative learning, each member of the team is expected to pull his own weight; if he does not, the group as a whole must devise a strategy for dealing with his reduced participation. Similarly, if one member of the group dominates the work of the others, the group as a whole must decide how to redress the imbalance. Therefore, though cooperative learning stresses the whole group’s function, it inevitably addresses issues of individual participation since its collective achievement is directly related to individual accountability.

### Grouping Strategies

There are many ways to group students for cooperative activity. Here is one.

1. Rank order your students according to achievement from highest to lowest. Use pretests, recent tests, grades, an estimate of potential, or your best guess.
2. Select your first team. Identify the top achiever, the bottom achiever, and two students in the middle. Assign them to one team unless they are all of one gender, the group does not mirror the ethnic composition of the class, they are all enemies, they are best friends, or they are frequently absent as a group. If one or more of these conditions is met, move one middle achiever in the rank order of the whole class up or down and reconstitute your first team.
3. Select the rest of the teams, each one in turn from the reduced class list. If you wind up with one group that contains fewer than four members, assign each student in the group to another group, with the result that you will have some groups of five.

### Cooperative Assessment

Grades for cooperative work can be assigned on an individual or group basis. Here are a few simple techniques for both strategies.

**Individual Grades.** If you would like to adjust the students’ individual scores for the group activity, give them bonus points after computing each group’s average score on an activity. You may then want to establish a cutoff for the bonus points, for example, a group average of 85% or better. That is, the team must meet that criterion to get any bonus points whatever. Otherwise, award bonus points without reference to a criterion by using a system like the following.
Every student in the group receives the same number of bonus points.

Alternatively, you may want to award individual bonus points. This is done on the basis of how far above or below the group average each student falls. In this case, use a system like the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deviation</th>
<th>Bonus Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 points below</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 points to 1 point below</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average to 10 points above</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 points above</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Add up the total number of bonus points for the group and divide by the number of group members to get a team score. Eighteen to 22 bonus points indicates a "great team," 23 or more a "super-team."

**Group Grades.** In this case, most teachers simply give everyone the group average. Occasionally, you might want to choose one score at random and assign it to the whole group. Infrequently, you may also want to give everyone the lowest score in the group. These somewhat manipulative measures are intended to build group solidarity.

**Preparing the Students**

Since cooperative learning is a departure from conventional practice, students need some help getting started. Here is a list of skills you may need to reinforce before students embark on a cooperative enterprise — and frequently thereafter. They should know how to:

1. explain directions
2. offer suggestions
3. help each other without interfering
4. encourage each other
5. paraphrase
6. request a justification
7. extend each other's utterances
8. express emotion
9. resolve conflict
10. criticize each other without giving offense
Needless to say, reinforcing these sociolinguistic skills is a rather tall order: indeed, any LEP student who has mastered them has gone a long way toward the acquisition of academic language (CALP) and successful integration in the educational process. It may be that the ultimate value of cooperative learning is its structured approach to achievement of that outcome.

References


How many people should be in each group?

You can use 2, 3, 4 or more people per group. Most people use 4 or 5. You should choose the number based on the design of your group activity. For example, if you have limited materials for group work, your group must be larger so they can share the materials. If you are not using materials, and you wish to have learners interview each other, pairs work better.

How should group members be selected?

There are two considerations:
1. What selection process should you use? You can choose yourself, ask learners to select partners, or choose randomly. Choosing randomly means learners will be chosen in no particular order. This usually means learners work with other learners sitting near them.
2. What combination of learners do you want in each group? You can also choose selectively, or on the basis of some characteristics. By choosing selectively, you can group learners with similar characteristics — for example,
   - by ability, with high, average and low achievers in one group
   - by gender with single sex or co-educationally (including boys and girls)
   - by social groups (e.g. mixing Ndonga and Kwanyama), or more popular with less popular learners
   - by interest or viewpoint.

You should choose the type of group based on the nature of the activity (see Procedure for designing group activities: A checklist, page 8).

Why should I use groups instead of something else (e.g., lecture, seat work)?

There are three reasons to use groups:
1. If your objective is to convey facts or processes that learners must memorize, direct instruction (teaching the whole class) is better. However, if your objective is to teach higher order thinking skills such as application, synthesis, analysis or evaluation, groups tend to work better. (We will discuss this in Module 14: Questioning Techniques).
2. Groups also work well for teaching cooperation and leadership skills, and for building learner confidence.
3. If an exercise requires several learners to have the same goal, you can use groups. This is called a group goal.

Here are some examples of group goals:
   - Everyone will be able to answer the questions correctly.
   - Everyone will be able to explain why it is important to eat energy foods.
   - Everyone will be able to read one sentence from the story.

Not all group work requires group goals, however. Sometimes, you can ask learners to work individually, but within a group. In this case, learners have individual goals, but can share their ideas with other learners or ask them for assistance.
Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

Module 4 Reading D, Group Work Rubrics and Checklists
Author: Teresa Gibbons

This rubric table is reprinted with permission from the [http://www.nald.ca/CLR/Btg/ed/evaluation/groupwork.htm](http://www.nald.ca/CLR/Btg/ed/evaluation/groupwork.htm) web site. It is one of four rubric examples on this site.

**Authors’ note:** Below is an example rubric for evaluating groups of students on their work. This could be used as-is or in a modified format as a student self-evaluation or as a teacher evaluation. It could be used as a formative evaluation for feedback at one or more points in the group work process (e.g., for longer group work projects). It could also be used as a summative evaluation at the end of a group project. For more on rubrics, see Module 10, Alternative Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Apprentice</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision Making</strong></td>
<td>One person dominates decision-making.</td>
<td>Some students contribute to decision-making.</td>
<td>Most students contribute to decision-making.</td>
<td>All students contribute to decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Interaction</strong></td>
<td>Students frequently interrupt and/or put down* the views of others.</td>
<td>Students pay attention to the group discussion. Some students ask questions and build on others comments.</td>
<td>Body and/or verbal responses indicate active listening. Most students ask questions or clarification. Students build on others comments.</td>
<td>Students respect and encourage the views of others. Students ask questions or clarification. Students build on others comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contributing</strong></td>
<td>Students do not contribute in any positive way to the group work.</td>
<td>Some students contribute positively to the group work.</td>
<td>Most students contribute positively to the group work.</td>
<td>Students consistently contribute in a positive way to the group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Task Behaviour</strong></td>
<td>Students exhibit on-task behaviour inconsistently.</td>
<td>Students exhibit on-task behaviour some of the time.</td>
<td>Most students exhibit on-task behaviour most of the time.</td>
<td>Students exhibit on-task behaviour consistently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Structure and Functioning</strong></td>
<td>With assistance, students have difficulty sequencing steps. Task is not completed on time.</td>
<td>With assistance, students are able to sequence steps. Rush to complete task. Division of tasks and responsibilities if inefficient and wastes time.</td>
<td>Students complete a sequence of steps. Complete task on time. The leader assigns responsibilities and tasks. Students complete a clear and logical sequence of steps.</td>
<td>Complete task with form and reflection and revision. Members volunteer to take responsibilities and roles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Module 4: Pairwork / Groupwork

List of Additional Readings and Resources


The Issue

A crucial issue for any teacher is when and how to correct students’ English mistakes. Of course, there are a number of types of corrections that teachers are expected to make during the course of any given class. Here are the main types of mistakes that need to be corrected:

- Grammatical mistakes (mistakes of verb tenses, preposition use, etc.)
- Vocabulary mistakes (incorrect collocations, idiomatic phrase usage, etc.)
- Pronunciation mistakes (errors in basic pronunciation, errors in word stressing in sentences, errors in rhythm and pitch)
- Written mistakes (grammar, spelling and vocabulary choice mistakes in written work)

The main issue at hand during oral work is whether or not to correct students as they make mistakes. Mistakes may be numerous and in various areas (grammar, vocabulary choice, pronunciation of both words and correct stressing in sentences). On the other hand, correction of written work boils down to how much correction should be done. In other words, should teachers correct every single mistake, or should they give a value judgement and correct only major mistakes.

Current Status, Mistakes Made During Discussions and Activities

With oral mistakes made during class discussions, there are basically two schools of thought: 1) Correct often and thoroughly 2) Let students make mistakes. Sometimes, teachers refine the choice by choosing to let beginners make many mistakes while correcting advanced students often.

However, many teachers are taking a third route these days. This third route might be called ‘selective correction.’ In this case, the teacher decides to correct only certain errors. Which errors will be corrected is usually decided by the objectives of the lesson, or the specific exercise that is being done at that moment. In other words, if students are focusing on simple past irregular forms, then only mistakes in those forms are corrected (i.e., goed, thinked, etc.). Other mistakes, such as mistakes in a future form, or mistakes of collocations (for example: I made my homework) are ignored.

Finally, many teachers also choose to correct students after the fact. Teachers take notes on common mistakes that students make. During the follow-up correction session the teacher then presents common mistakes made so that all can benefit from an analysis of which mistakes were made and why.

Written Mistakes

There are three basic approaches to correcting written work: 1) Correct each mistake 2) Give a general impression marking 3) Underline mistakes and / or give clues to the type of mistakes made and then let students correct the work themselves.
Module 5: Learner Feedback

What’s all the Fuss About?

There are two main points to this issue:
1) If I allow students to make mistakes, I will reinforce the errors they are making.

Many teachers feel that if they do not correct mistakes immediately, they will be helping reinforce incorrect language production skills. This point of view is also reinforced by students who often expect teachers to continually correct them during class. The failure to do so will often create suspicion on the part of the students.

2) If I don’t allow students to make mistakes, I will take away from the natural learning process required to achieve competency and, eventually, fluency.

Learning a language is a long process during which a learner will inevitably make many, many mistakes. In other words we take a myriad of tiny steps going from not speaking a language to being fluent in the language. In the opinion of many teachers, students who are continually corrected become inhibited and cease to participate. This results in the exact opposite of what the teacher is trying to produce — the use of English to communicate.

Why Correction is Necessary

Correction is necessary. The argument that students just need to use the language and the rest will come by itself seems rather weak. Students come to us to teach them. If they want only conversation, they will probably inform us — or, they might just go to a chat room on the Internet. Obviously students need to be corrected as part of the learning experience. However, students also need to be encouraged to use the language. It is true that correcting students while they are trying their best to use the language can often discourage them. The most satisfactory solution of all is make correction an activity. Correction can be used as a follow-up to any given class activity. However, correction sessions can be used as a valid activity in and of themselves. In other words, teachers can set up an activity during which each mistake (or a specific type of mistake) will be corrected. Students know that the activity is going to focus on correction, and accept that fact. However, these activities should be kept in balance with other, more free-form, activities which give students the opportunity to express themselves without having to worry about being corrected every other word.

Finally, other techniques should be used to make correction not only part of the lesson, but also a more effective learning tool for the students. These techniques include:
• Deferring correction to the end of an activity
• Taking notes on typical mistakes made by many students
• Correcting only one type of error
• Giving students clues to the type of error they are making (in written work) but allowing them to correct the mistakes themselves
• Asking other students to remark on mistakes made and then explain the rules by themselves. A great technique for getting ‘teacher pets’ listening instead of answering each question themselves. However, use this with caution!
Summary

Correction is not an ‘either/or’ issue. Correction needs to take place, and is expected and desired by students. However, the manner in which teachers correct students plays a vital role in whether students become confident in their usage or become intimidated. Correcting students as a group, in correction sessions, at the end of activities, and letting them correct their own mistakes all help in encouraging students to use English rather than to worry about making too many mistakes.
Overview

When it comes to error correction we are dealing with one individual’s reaction to a student’s piece of writing or utterance. This inevitably means that there will be some disagreement among teachers about what, when, and how to correct. Therefore the aim of this article is not to be prescriptive, but to highlight some key areas. It is in two parts.

Attitudes to Error Correction

Attitudes to error correction vary not only among teachers but also among students. A teacher may be influenced by:

- The fact that English is their second language and great emphasis was placed on correctness at their teacher training college.
- The fact that as a native speaker they have never had to worry about their English.
- A particular methodology/approach. In the 1960s a teacher using Audiolingualism would have adopted a behaviourist approach to error. More recently a teacher following the Natural Approach (influenced by second language acquisition theory) would have adopted a wholly different approach. Other methodologies/approaches, such as Suggestopaedia and Total Physical Response, highlight the psychological effects of error correction on students.

As for students, we not only have to consider their age but also their approach to learning. Some students are risk-takers, while others will only say something if they are sure it is correct. While being a risk-taker is generally positive as it leads to greater fluency, some students only seem to be concerned with fluency at the expense of accuracy. The same can be true when it comes to writing. Some students take an eternity to produce a piece of writing as they are constantly rubbing out what they have written while at the opposite extreme the writing is done as fast as possible without any planning or editing.

Categorising Errors

We can categorise an error by the reason for its production or by its linguistic type.

What’s the reason for the error?

- It is the result of a random guess (pre-systematic).
- It was produced while testing out hypotheses (systematic).
- It is a slip of the tongue, a lapse, a mistake (caused by carelessness, fatigue etc.) (post-systematic).

To be sure about the type of error produced by a student we need to know where the student’s interlanguage is (the language used by a student in the process of learning a second language).

What type is it? We can classify errors simply as productive (spoken or written) or receptive (faulty understanding). Alternatively we can use the following:

- A lexical error — vocabulary.
- A phonological error — pronunciation.
- A syntactic error — grammar.
Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

- An interpretive error — misunderstanding of a speaker's intention or meaning.
- A pragmatic error — failure to apply the rules of conversation.

A Model for Correcting Writing

When writing we do not have the chance to rephrase or clarify what we are saying. Our message must be clear the first time. Written errors are also less tolerated than spoken errors outside the classroom. Look at this model for correcting written work and evaluate it for your teaching situation.

1. Comprehensibility
   - Can you understand the output?
   - Are there areas of incoherence?
   - Do these affect the overall message?
   - Does communication break down?

2. Task
   - Has the student addressed the task?

3. Syntax and Lexis
   - Are they appropriate to the task?
   - Are they accurate?

The Role of Planning

Giving students time to plan not only results in a wider range of language being used, it also helps students to avoid some of the following:
- Inappropriate layout
- No paragraphs
- Lack of cohesion
- Inappropriate style

Whichever style of plan (linear notes or a mind map), these questions will help students to plan their writing:
- What am I going to write (an informal letter, etc.)?
- What layout do I need?
- What information am I going to include?
- How many paragraphs do I need?
- What grammar / vocabulary am I going to use?
- What linking words (because, and, etc.) am I going to use?

Practical Techniques / Ideas for Correcting Writing

Training students to edit. Even though they have invested time in doing a writing task, students often don't spend a few more minutes checking their writing. The following activities not only help to develop students' editing skills in a fun way, but also enable the teacher to focus on key errors without individual students losing face.
- Grammar auctions: (From Grammar Games by M. Rinvoluci CUP) Students receive a number of sentences taken from their written work. Some are correct, some wrong. Students in groups have to try to buy the correct ones in the auction. They have a limited amount of money. The team with the most correct sentences wins.
Module 5: Learner Feedback

• Mistakes mazes: (From Correction by Bartram and Walton Thomon Heinle). Students have a list of sentences. Their route through a maze depends on whether the sentences are right or wrong. They follow white arrows for correct sentences and black ones for incorrect ones. If they have identified all the sentences correctly they escape, if not they have to retrace their steps and find out where they went wrong.

Correction techniques. It can be difficult to decide on what and how much to correct in a student’s piece of writing. Students can develop a negative attitude towards writing because their teacher corrects all their errors or if the teacher only corrects a few, they might feel that the teacher hasn’t spent sufficient time looking at their work. Evaluate the following techniques and decide which would be appropriate for your teaching situation. Underline inappropriate language in a piece of writing using a specific colour.
  • Using a different colour from above, underline examples of appropriate language.
  • Correct errors by writing the correct forms in their place.
  • Use codes in the margin to identify the type of error(s), for example, VOC = a lexical error. Students have to identify the error(s) and if possible make a correction.
  • Alternatively put crosses in the margin for the number of errors in each line. Students then try to identify the errors and make corrections.
  • Put students into pairs / groups. They correct each other’s work using one or more of the techniques above.
  • From time to time give students an individual breakdown of recurring problems in their written work.

A Basic Approach to Improving Fluency and Accuracy

In contrast to writing, students have very little processing time when it comes to speaking, so it is hardly surprising that the following may occur.
  • Students don’t experiment with new language presented by the teacher.
  • At lower levels students’ output is mostly lexical.
  • The more accuracy-focused students test the patience of the listener in the time they take to say something.
  • The speech of some very fluent students is littered with errors and therefore may have a negative effect on the listener.

Just as with writing we can help students to improve their accuracy and fluency. Teachers can help students improve their fluency by giving guided preparation time for a task. Students receive specific guidance in choosing appropriate language as well as rehearsal time. Task-based learning research shows that this leads to a greater range of language being used.

When it comes to accuracy, research into second language acquisition says that the first stage of improving accuracy is awareness-raising. Namely, raising students’ awareness of gaps in their interlanguage. You can do this by using a recording of teachers / higher level students performing the same task that your students have done. Use awareness-raising exercises to focus on specific linguistic areas in the recording.

Dictogloss — A Way of Raising Students’ Awareness of Their Inter-language

Dictogloss (see ‘Grammar Dictation’ by R. Wajnryb OUP) is a very effective technique for doing this. After an introduction to the subject and some pre-teaching of essential lexis, students are read a text twice. The first time they listen to get the gist of the text. The second time they have to note down
the key words. Then, in groups they work together to produce a version of the text. The emphasis is on successfully communicating the main points using their English. If they can reproduce the original text, that is great, but it is not essential. The teacher and groups then correct their texts and compare them with the original. The aim is to make students aware of the gaps in their inter-language.

**Criteria for Dealing with Spoken Errors**

In ‘Correction’ by M. Bartram and R. Walton present these questions as a guide to deciding whether to let an error go or not. Which do you consider to be the most important?

1. Does the mistake affect communication?
2. Are we concentrating on accuracy at the moment?
3. Is it really wrong? Or is it my imagination?
4. Why did the student make the mistake?
5. Is it the first time the student has spoken for a long time?
6. Could the student react badly to my correction?
7. Have they met this language point in the current lesson?
8. Is it something the students have already met?
9. Is this a mistake that several students are making?
10. Would the mistake irritate someone?
11. What time is it?
12. What day is it?
13. What’s the weather like?

**Practical Techniques / ideas for Correcting Spoken English**

On-the-spot correction techniques. These are used for dealing with errors as they occur.

- Using fingers: For example, to highlight an incorrect form or to indicate a word order mistake.
- Gestures: For example, using hand gestures to indicate the use of the wrong tense.
- Mouthing: This is useful with pronunciation errors. The teacher mouths the correct pronunciation without making a sound. For example, when an individual sound is mispronounced or when the word stress is wrong. Of course it can also be used to correct other spoken errors.
- Reformulation, for example:
  
  Student: I went in Scotland
  
  Teacher: Oh really, you went to Scotland, did you?

Delayed correction techniques. For example, after a communication activity.

Noting down errors: Either on an individual basis i.e. focusing on each student’s mistakes or for the class as a whole. ‘Hot cards’, as Bartram and Walton call individual notes, can be used to focus on recurring mistakes. The student then has a written suggestion of what to work on.

Recording: In addition to recording students (individually, in pairs etc.) during a speaking task to make them aware of errors that affect communication we can use a technique from Community Language Learning. Students sit in a circle with a tape recorder in the centre. In monolingual classes they check with the teacher, who is bilingual, about how to say something in English, then rehearse it and record it. At the end of the lesson they listen back to the tape and can focus on specific utterances etc. With higher level multilingual classes students take part in a discussion which they have prepared for in advance. When they have something to say they record themselves and then pause the tape. Just as with monolingual classes they can use the teacher as a linguistic resource. At the end
of the discussion students analyse their performance with the teacher. The focus is on improving the quality of what they say and expanding their inter-language.

Although this form of discussion may seem a bit artificial it has two main advantages:
- Students pay more attention to what they say as they are taking part in a kind of performance (it is being recorded)
- Students not only become more aware of gaps in their spoken English but also can see how their spoken English is improving.

Further Reading

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List of Additional Readings and Resources


These are mostly suited for the younger students but can be adapted for older classes.

**A List of Ways to Encourage Good Behaviour**

1. **Classroom Rules:** Work with students to come up with a set of classroom rules and consequences.

2. **Colour Cards:** Have a pocket chart with all students names on it. Beside each name have a pocket where either a red, yellow, or green card will be display. Red = some sort of consequence decided and explained earlier. Yellow = Warning. Green = You’re doing great.

3. **Punch Out Card:** Each child receives a pad of paper. Whenever they are performing well, helping out, etc., give them a punch with a one-hole puncher. When students reach a certain number of punches, they can get a reward or pick from a box of prizes.

4. **Class Points:** Display a tally system of points on the blackboard. Every time students are performing well, give them a point. When the class earns a certain number of points by the end of the week, they get to do a class fun activity at the end of the week.

5. **Marble Jar:** If the class is doing well add a marble to the marble jar. When the jar is filled, they get to do a class fun activity. Count the marbles regularly as a regular math activity.

6. **Positive Popsicle* Sticks [or Paper Slips]:** Write out positive comments on sticks [or slips of paper] like “great helper,” “super effort,” etc., and hand them out accordingly. When each student receives a certain number of sticks [or papers] he or she can get a reward.

7. **Good Behavior Chart:** As a class, come up with a list of good behaviors. At the end of the day, go through each one and ask the class how each was demonstrated in the classroom during the day. Then, as a class thank the student who accomplished it.

[*Note from the author of this manual: Popsicles are sweet, frozen, fruit-flavored desserts that typically come on a wooden stick. Part of the stick is bare. The stick makes them easy to hold and eat.]

**A List of Reward Ideas**

Effort has been given to provide a combination of reward ideas suited for both primary and intermediate students.

1. Sit at the teacher’s desk.
2. Take care of the class animals for the day.
3. Have lunch with your favorite person.
4. Have lunch with the principal.
5. Join another class for indoor recess.
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6. Have the teacher phone parents to tell them what a great kid you are.
7. Draw on the chalkboard.
8. Be first in line.
9. Do only half an assignment.
10. Choose any class job for the week.
12. Take a tape recorder [or other class item] home for the night.
13. Use colored chalk.
14. Do all the class jobs for the day.
15. Invite a visitor from outside the school.
16. Get a drink whenever you want.
17. Use the pencil sharpener any time.
18. No early morning work.
19. Take a class pet home overnight.
20. Be a helper in the room with younger children.
21. Help the custodian.
22. Help the secretary.
23. Help the librarian.
24. Stay in at recess to play a game with a friend.
25. Use stamps and ink.
26. Invite a friend from another class into the room for lunch.
27. Use the teacher's chair.
28. Work in the lunchroom.
29. Take a class game home for the night.
30. Choose a book for the teacher to read to the class.
31. Move your desk to a chosen location.
32. Keep an animal on your desk, stuffed or not stuffed.
33. No homework pass.
34. Lunch with the teacher.
35. Operate the projector.
36. Use the couch or beanbag chair for the day.
37. Go to another class for lunch.
38. Use the computer.
39. Be the first to eat.
40. Use the tape recorder and tape a story.
41. Have a special sharing time to teach something to the class, set up a display etc.
42. Be leader of a class game.
43. Go to the centre or your choice during play centre time.
44. Extra centre time or extra recess.
45. Read to a younger child.
46. Read to someone else.
47. Get first pick of recess equipment.
48. Get a fun worksheet.
49. Choose a movie for the class to watch.

[Note from the author of this manual: Taking into consideration your own local educational setting, what other kinds of “rewards” would be appropriate on a list such as this one?]
Overview

In the present EFL classroom, the teaching of listening and speaking relies heavily on the use of the language lab or tape-recorders. It is generally agreed in China that the main reason for this is that most EFL teachers are non-native English speakers and thus may lack proficiency in English. However, in the classroom in which the tape recorder is used frequently there are some common problems. For instance, teachers may just manipulate the “machine,” supplemented by a few comprehension questions after the students listen to the aural material. This can hinder the intrinsic motivation of students. How much do students take in when they are faced with “machines”? Normally, most of the teacher-posed questions are answered by the better students. Meanwhile, the majority of students just remain silent and listen. Some may even feel bored and sleepy. In such cases, how can we motivate all the students in the class to participate actively in the listening lesson?

Unlike the listening classroom, native English speakers have been invited in recent years to teach speaking. These teachers have made the speaking classroom more lively and have helped more fluent student speakers. Yet we find that many students speak as poorly, if not worse, than those we taught years ago. To find out why, we observed the lessons taught by the native English teacher. After a few observations of the same class, we realized that only the better students took the opportunities to talk in group work. And usually it was these students who spoke for most of the discussion time. These students were able to monopolize discussions for the following reasons:

• The large size of the class: This makes it difficult for the teacher to control the whole class in group work and to get feedback from all the students.
• Affective factors: Some extroverted students tend to be talkative and learn better in oral work, while the introverted ones remain quiet.
• Lack of interesting authentic materials: Listening materials in China depend to a large extent on the textbook. Even teachers who are very proficient in English are not encouraged to make tapes of their own for the students.

Implementing Aural Tapes and Turn-taking

In order to enhance the speaking competence of our students in the oral communication classroom, students must have sufficient comprehensible language input, most often through language tapes. At the same time, language learning must be linked to meaningful language use on the part of the learner in the communicative classroom. The language learning experience must involve the expression of the learner’s opinions and thoughts as s/he negotiates interactively with other classmates and with the teacher.

Here personal investment is crucial. Some students in the classroom do not take the opportunity to speak in group work or to respond actively after listening, partly because of a lack of roles to play or turns to take and partly because of affective factors. One of the major obstacles in learning to speak is “the anxiety generated over the risks of blurtling things out that are wrong, stupid or incomprehensible” (Brown 1994b: 255). The language ego here makes some students fearful of being judged
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or teased by others. Some anxiety, however, is needed because it contributes to learning in the classroom (Brown 1994a). The techniques here — implementing turn-taking with the help of tape-recorders — can be very effective and practical for the teaching of both listening and speaking. They can be achieved best by integrating listening and speaking.

The Teaching of Listening

Focusing on listening is particularly advantageous in large classes. Through proper speaking activities, such as teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions, we can get immediate feedback from the students and at the same time motivate them to listen more attentively. How can we integrate listening with speaking with every student involved in a large class? The following are the proposed procedures (for intermediate level) in the listening classroom.

Pre-listening: Activity 1

Warm-up questions: This activity can be done as pair work in quasi-communicative activities, the goal of which is to relate students’ prior knowledge (schemas) to the message they will listen to. In this case, students may lower their affective filters, and have their respective turns to speak.

While-listening: Activity 2

After students listen to the message once or twice, the teacher may use pauses and ask questions (using both bottom-up and top-down skills). Before asking questions, however, it is better for the teacher to tell the students that everybody will be asked to respond. In this way, the students will listen more attentively.

Activity 3

Teacher-led evaluation and self / peer evaluation can be done with the help of tape recorders or through the integration of the language skills, as described below.

(a) The teacher asks listening comprehension questions one after another; all the students answer them respectively through student microphones and simultaneously record their responses with student tape recorders. Then, the teacher can ask any student (through teacher-to-individual student calls) to play his / her tape to the class so that other students will not know who answered the question. Then, teacher-led evaluations and self / pair evaluations follow. In this manner, students learn in an uncompetitive situation, and thus lower their affective filters. Moreover, every student in a large class can get a chance to practice.

(b) Self / pair evaluation can be done through the integration of listening with writing. Some forms or blanks can be made beforehand by the teacher for the students to fill in after they listen to the tape several times. And then, ask the students to check the answers in pairs with the help of the teacher’s feedback or correction.

Post-listening: Activity 4

Role-plays: Ask students to take roles in listening to conversations or dialogues. Role-playing one of the speakers makes students listen more attentively to the speaker they will play. These role-plays can be practiced in pairs or groups. Such speaking performance after listening can be done in class, if time permits, or after class as homework, as required later in the sample task for a speaking class.
The Teaching of Speaking

In contrast to the listening class, the focus of teaching speaking, of course, is to improve the oral production of the students. Therefore, language teaching activities in the classroom should aim at maximizing individual language use. This requires the teacher not only to create a warm and humanistic classroom atmosphere, but also to provide each student with a turn to speak or a role to play. Pair work and group work, therefore, are often implemented in the oral communication class. Communicative language teaching, however, does not merely mean pair / group work. Since learning and communication strategies form one of the components of communicative competence, we should spend more time teaching speaking strategies, or communication strategies which are normally ignored by EFL teachers. Our students need to learn not only linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge but also how to use speaking strategies to keep conversations going.

In large EFL speaking classes, pair work and group work are often difficult to carry out effectively due to affective factors and problems of logistics. Here too, tape-recorders and role-plays come to our aid. First, we can use tapes to warm up or promote students’ pair discussion through songs, music, or sounds like whistling winds, breaking waves, and so forth. Then, we can use role-plays in class to enable each student to speak. Generally, there is insufficient time for each group in a big class to present their role-plays to the whole class. Homework, therefore, should be assigned, as shown below.

Here are some guidelines for lesson planning, aimed at solving the aforementioned problem in our large EFL speaking class:

- Present and explain the speaking strategies.
- In a large EFL class, speaking strategies, such as asking for clarification and using fillers in order to gain time to process, etc., can first be introduced to the students by exemplification. These strategies should be related to the topic to be discussed in class.
- Provide a topic that engages the interest of the group and is educationally enriching. Design a group task that involves some degree of discussion and uses the strategies presented and explained by the teacher related to the topic.
- Consider and specify the role each participant of the group can play in the group discussion. Clear specifications are useful in avoiding problems, such as uneven participation.
- Specify the time allotted for group discussion and presentation of group views to the class.
- Provide adequate help to the students in the form of information, guidelines, or vocabulary prior to or during the group discussion.
- Employ the following homework procedure: (a) A task implementing the above guidance should be given as homework to the students; (b) The oral group task should encourage the use of authentic language in meaningful contexts; (c) Each group will record the oral work of its members and submit the tape signed with their names to the teacher for assessment; (d) The teacher gives feedback to the students and plays selected tapes to the class.

The following is a sample of instructions for such a task.

Instructions: In the subsequent task you may use the following speaking strategies: description, and fillers, such as well, er, you know, etc., to gain time to process your thoughts—just do not let yourself stop.

Such strategies are divided into two kinds. One is based on the native language, such as borrowing, literal translation, and coining; the other is based on the target language, including use of a general word, approximation, description, word coinage, appeal for assistance, etc. (Cohen 1990)
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In your group, suppose that you are members of a scholarship selection committee that is responsible for interviewing and choosing one candidate to receive a scholarship for a postgraduate degree in business administration in the USA. Each person in the group represents one of the following:

- a university lecturer representing the college.
- a bank officer representing the bank that finances the scholarship.
- a government official who recommended the candidates.
- a businessman who is the future employer.

Candidate one: Wu Fang [or choose another name] is 40 years old and has been working with the trade company for ten years. Before that he taught in a middle school in the rural areas. He is physically fit and once trained in martial arts for competitions. He has traveled widely. He has an 18 year-old son who is a college student now. He likes business very much.

Candidate two: Li Ping [or choose another name] is 27 years old and is a translator in a joint venture company in Beijing. He graduated from the Beijing Foreign Language Institute, where he obtained an MA. He has an excellent academic record. He is single and lives with his parents. His parents took care of him when he was very sickly in the university. He is still staying with them to take care of them because both of them are in poor health.

Candidate three: Tong Xi [or choose another name] is supervisor of a department in a joint venture company. She was initially a foreign language teacher in a college. She left teaching to start a small business in Shanghai. She sells ladies’ garments and started a small factory with a group of friends. She is divorced and has an eight-year old daughter. Her parents do not live with her as they are more accustomed to country life in Jiang Xi Province.

Conclusion

The program we designed has improved the teaching of oral communication in our large EFL classes. It has the following advantages: (a) It capitalizes on the natural link between listening and speaking; (b) It focuses on both language-based accuracy and message-based fluency, interaction, and meaning; (c) It encourages the use of authentic language in meaningful and less competitive contexts; (d) It provides appropriate feedback and correction; (e) It gives students opportunities to initiate oral communication; (f) It encourages the development of speaking strategies; and (g) It provides intrinsically motivating techniques. In short, it is an effective program for the teaching of listening and speaking in our large EFL classrooms.

References


Module 6: Managing Large Classes

List of Additional Readings and Resources


Overview

For more than two decades there has been an abundance of research regarding strategy instruction. Originally, most of this research focused on the effects of strategy instruction on students with learning disabilities. Researchers are currently looking at how strategy instruction affects all learners.

What is a strategy?

In general, a strategy is a tool, plan, or method used for accomplishing a task. Below are other terms associated with strategy instruction, some of which are discussed in this digest:

- Cognitive Strategy: a strategy or group of strategies or procedures that the learner uses to perform academic tasks or to improve social skills. Often, more than one cognitive strategy is used with others, depending on the learner and his/her schema for learning. In fact, research indicates that successful learners use numerous strategies. Some of these strategies include visualization, verbalization, making associations, chunking, questioning, scanning, underlining, accessing cues, using mnemonics, sounding out words, and self-checking and monitoring.
- Cues: visual or verbal prompts to either remind the student what has already been learned or provide an opportunity to learn something new. Cues can also be employed to prompt student use of a strategy.
- Independent, Strategic Learner: the student who uses cues and strategies within his/her learning schema, asks clarifying questions, listens, checks and monitors his/her work and behavior, and sets personal goals. A strategic learner knows the value of using particular strategies through experience, and is eager to learn others that might prove beneficial.
- Learning Strategy: a set of steps to accomplish a particular task, such as taking a test, comprehending text, and writing a story. A first-letter mnemonic is often used to help the learner follow the steps of the strategy.
- Metacognition and Self-regulation: the understanding a person has about how s/he learns (personal learning schema) including the strategies used to accomplish tasks, and the process by which the learner oversees and monitors his/her use of strategies.
- Mnemonic: a device for remembering, such as a first-letter mnemonic for writing: PLAN (Pay attention to the prompt, List main ideas, Add supporting ideas, Number your ideas) (DeLaPaz, Owen, Harris and Graham, 2000). Rhyme, rhythm, music, and key-word mnemonics are also useful memory tools.
- Strategy Instruction: teaching students about strategies, teaching them how and when to use strategies, helping students identify personally effective strategies, and encouraging them to make strategic behaviors part of their learning schema.
- Learning Schema: the sets, or mixes, of strategies that the individual learner uses automatically to perform, produce, communicate, or learn. It can take years to develop a personal learning schema.

What has been learned about the effectiveness of strategy instruction?

Many students' ability to learn has been increased through the deliberate teaching of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This is especially true for students with significant learning problems.
strategy instruction is crucial for them. It has been demonstrated that when struggling students are taught strategies and are given ample encouragement, feedback, and opportunities to use them, students improve in their ability to process information, which, in turn, leads to improved learning. Because not all students will find it easy to imbed strategy use in their learning schema, differentiation of strategies instruction is required, with some students needing more scaffolding and individualized, intensive instruction than others.

Why is it important to teach children to be strategic?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 focus on improved achievement by all students. IDEA mandates that all students access and progress in the general education curriculum. This includes students with disabilities, English language learners, and gifted students. NCLB has established performance goals that drive the efforts of public schools, especially in establishing proficiency in reading / language arts and mathematics by all students by the year 2013-2014. The outcomes listed below help ensure student progress. Additionally, when students become strategic, independent learners, they also become literate and productive lifelong learners.

What happens to students when they become strategic?

The following outcomes can be expected:
• Students trust their minds.
• Students know there’s more than one right way to do things.
• They acknowledge their mistakes and try to rectify them.
• They evaluate their products and behavior.
• Memories are enhanced.
• Learning increases.
• Self-esteem increases.
• Students feel a sense of power.
• Students become more responsible.
• Work completion and accuracy improve.
• Students develop and use a personal study process.
• They know how to “try.”
• On-task time increases; students are more “engaged.”

What are the most essential strategies to teach?

This is determined, in large part, by assessing what successful, efficient learners do. It has been found that they use numerous strategies across subjects and tasks, such as those listed above under “cognitive strategies.” They know when to use strategies and for what purposes. An attempt to identify the most essential strategies students should learn is an impossible task; it depends on the needs of the learner and the requirements of the curriculum. However, student use of the following strategies often leads to improved student performance (lists are not inclusive):

• Computation and problem-solving: Verbalization, visualization, chunking, making associations, use of cues.
• Memory: Visualization, verbalization, mnemonics, making associations, chunking, and writing. These are usually more effective when used in combinations.
• Productivity: Verbalization, self-monitoring, visualization, use of cues.
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- Reading accuracy and fluency: Finger pointing or tracking, sounding out unknown words, self-questioning for accuracy, chunking, and using contextual clues.
- Reading comprehension: Visualization, questioning, rereading, predicting.
- Writing: Planning, revising, questioning, use of cues, verbalization, visualization, checking and monitoring. How are students taught to use strategies? Effective strategy instruction is an integral part of classroom instruction, regardless of the content being taught; it is not an additional subject. In the transactional strategies instruction (TSI) model, strategies instruction takes place all year long with the teacher giving explanations and modeling. Teachers continually praise students for using strategies and use teachable moments to discuss them. Students are encouraged to help their peers become more strategic.

What are the basic steps in teaching strategy use?

The following order of steps should be followed:

- Describe the strategy. Students obtain an understanding of the strategy and its purpose—why it is important, when it can be used, and how to use it.
- Model its use. The teacher models the strategy, explaining to the students how to perform it.
- Provide ample assisted practice time. The teacher monitors, provides cues, and gives feedback. Practice results in automaticity so the student doesn’t have to “think” about using the strategy.
- Promote student self-monitoring and evaluation of personal strategy use. Students will likely use the strategy if they see how it works for them; it will become part of their learning schema.
- Encourage continued use and generalization of the strategy. Students are encouraged to try the strategy in other learning situations.

To what extent is strategy instruction taking place in classrooms?

Currently, there are little data available to determine how many teachers teach strategic learning skills, how many are even aware of their existence, or if they are aware, have the skills to teach them. Few teachers demonstrate to their students their own personal strategy use. In general, teachers are not aware of the importance of these skills. The fact that there is such little data leads to the assumption that strategy instruction is not a general classroom practice. Following are a few possible explanations for this:

- Early strategy instruction research was done specifically with learning disabled populations. General education preservice and inservice programs have not generalized these research findings to all learners.
- How students learn takes a back seat to what is learned. Teachers assume students will “get it” on their own, or with more teacher-directed instruction or practice.
- The idea of focusing on the learner is still in its infancy.
- “Educator overload” is a factor. Teachers, experiencing the pressures of accountability for student progress, feel they don’t have time to “learn one more thing,” especially something they are not convinced will improve student learning.

Numerous researchers are assisting educators in turning strategies research into practice. An increasing number of strategies instruction curricula are available, especially in reading and writing.
Module 7: Learning Strategies

Resources


Overview

Students of foreign language are being encouraged to learn and use a broad range of language learning strategies that can be tapped throughout the learning process. This approach is based on the belief that learning will be facilitated by making students aware of the range of strategies from which they can choose during language learning and use. The most efficient way to heighten learner awareness is to provide strategy training—explicit instruction in how to apply language learning strategies—as part of the foreign language curriculum. This digest discusses the goals of strategy training, highlights approaches to such training, and lists steps for designing strategy training programs.

Goals of Strategy Training

Strategy training aims to provide learners with the tools to do the following:
- Self-diagnose their strengths and weaknesses in language learning.
- Become aware of what helps them to learn the target language most efficiently.
- Develop a broad range of problem-solving skills.
- Experiment with familiar and unfamiliar learning strategies.
- Make decisions about how to approach a language task.
- Monitor and self-evaluate their performance.
- Transfer successful strategies to new learning contexts.

Strategies can be categorized as either language learning or language use strategies. Language learning strategies are conscious thoughts and behaviors used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of a target language. They include cognitive strategies for memorizing and manipulating target language structures, metacognitive strategies for managing and supervising strategy use, affective strategies for gauging emotional reactions to learning and for lowering anxieties, and social strategies for enhancing learning, such as cooperating with other learners and seeking to interact with native speakers.

Language use strategies come into play once the language material is already accessible, even in some preliminary form. Their focus is to help students utilize the language they have already learned. Language use strategies include strategies for retrieving information about the language already stored in memory, rehearsing target language structures, and communicating in the language despite gaps in target language knowledge.

Frameworks for Strategy Training

Although no empirical evidence has yet been provided to determine a single best method for conducting strategy training, at least three different instructional frameworks have been identified. Each has been designed to raise student awareness of the purpose and rationale of strategy use, give students opportunities to practice the strategies they are being taught, and help them use the strategies in new learning contexts.
Module 7: Learning Strategies

One framework, proposed by Pearson and Dole (1987) with reference to first language learning but applicable to the study of a second language as well, targets isolated strategies by including explicit modeling and explanation of the benefits of applying a specific strategy, extensive functional practice with the strategy, and an opportunity to transfer the strategy to new learning contexts. The sequence includes the following steps:

- Initial modeling of the strategy by the teacher, with direct explanation of the strategy’s use and importance.
- Guided practice with the strategy.
- Consolidation, where teachers help students identify the strategy and decide when it might be used.
- Independent practice with the strategy.
- Application of the strategy to new tasks.

In the second framework, Oxford et al. (1990) outline a useful sequence for the introduction of strategies that emphasizes explicit strategy awareness, discussion of the benefits of strategy use, functional and contextualized practice with the strategies, self-evaluation and monitoring of language performance, and suggestions for or demonstrations of the transferability of the strategies to new tasks. This sequence is not prescriptive of strategies that the learners are supposed to use, but rather descriptive of the various strategies that they could use for a broad range of learning tasks.

The third framework, developed by Chamot and O’Malley (1994), is especially useful after students have already had practice in applying a broad range of strategies in a variety of contexts. Their approach to helping students complete language learning tasks can be described as a four-stage problem-solving process.

1. Planning. Students plan ways to approach a learning task.
2. Monitoring. Students self-monitor their performance by paying attention to their strategy use and checking comprehension.
4. Evaluation. Students learn to evaluate the effectiveness of a given strategy after it has been applied to a learning task.

Options for Providing Strategy Training

A variety of instructional models for foreign language strategy training have already been developed and implemented in a variety of educational settings. Seven of these are described below.

General Study Skills Courses. These courses are sometimes intended for students with academic difficulties but can also target successful students who want to improve their study habits. Many general academic skills can be transferred to the process of learning a foreign language, such as using flash cards, overcoming anxiety, and learning good note-taking skills. These courses sometimes include language learning as a specific topic to highlight how learning a foreign language may differ from learning other academic subjects. Foreign language students can be encouraged to participate in order to develop general learning strategies.

Awareness Training. Lectures and Discussion. Also known as consciousness-raising or familiarization training, this consists most often of isolated lectures and discussions and is usually separate from regular classroom instruction. This approach provides students with a general introduction to
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strategy applications. Oxford (1990) describes awareness training as “a program in which participants become aware of and familiar with the general idea of language learning strategies and the way such strategies can help them accomplish various language tasks” (p. 202).

Strategy Workshops. Short workshops are another, usually more intensive, approach to increasing learner awareness of strategies through various consciousness-raising and strategy-assessment activities. They may help to improve specific language skills or present ideas for learning certain aspects of a particular foreign language. These workshops may be offered as non-credit courses or required as part of a language or academic skills course. They often combine lectures, hands-on practice with specific strategies, and discussions about the effectiveness of strategy use.

Peer Tutoring. “Tandem” or peer tutoring programs began in the 1970s in Europe and are flourishing in many universities across the United States. Holec (1988) describes this system as “a direct language exchange” program that pairs students of different native language backgrounds for mutual tutoring sessions (e.g., an English-speaking student studying Italian and a native-Italian-speaking student learning English). Requirements of the tutoring sessions are that students have regular meetings, alternate roles of learner and teacher, practice the two languages separately, and devote equal amounts of time to each language. Often, students exchange suggestions about the language learning strategies they use, thus providing an ad hoc form of strategy training.

Another approach to peer sessions is to encourage students who are studying the same language to organize regular target-language study groups. Students who have already completed the language course may also be invited to these meetings. Less proficient students can benefit from the language skills of more proficient students, and more proficient students may yield better insights into the particular difficulties of the target language than a teacher.

Strategies in Language Textbooks. Many foreign language textbooks have begun to embed strategies into their curricula. However, unless the strategies are explained, modeled, or reinforced by the classroom teacher, students may not be aware that they are using strategies at all. A few language textbooks provide strategy-embedded activities and explicit explanations of the benefits and applications of the strategies they address. Because the focus of the activities is contextualized language learning, learners can develop their learning strategy repertoires while learning the target language. One advantage of using textbooks with explicit strategy training is that students do not need extracurricular training; the textbooks reinforce strategy use across both tasks and skills, encouraging students to continue applying them on their own.

Videotaped Mini-Courses. Rubin (1996) developed an interactive videodisc program and accompanying instructional guide aimed at raising students’ awareness of learning strategies and of the learning process in general, to show students how to transfer strategies to new tasks and to help them take charge of their own progress while learning the language. Using authentic language situations, the instructional program includes 20 foreign languages and offers the opportunity to select the language, topic, and difficulty level. Materials are structured to expose students to various strategies for use in many different contexts.

Strategies-Based Instruction (SBI). SBI is a learner-centered approach to teaching that extends classroom strategy training to include both implicit and explicit integration of strategies into the course content. Students experience the advantages of systematically applying the strategies to the learning and use of the language they are studying. In addition, they have opportunities to share their preferred strategies with other students and to increase their strategy use in the typical language tasks they are asked to perform. Teachers can individualize strategy training, suggest language-specific strategies, and reinforce strategies while presenting the regular course content.
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In a typical SBI classroom, teachers do the following:
- Describe, model, and give examples of potentially useful strategies
- Elicit additional examples from students, based on students’ own learning experiences
- Lead small-group and whole-class discussions about strategies
- Encourage students to experiment with a broad range of strategies
- Integrate strategies into everyday class materials, explicitly and implicitly embedding them into the language tasks to provide for contextualized strategy practice

Teachers may conduct SBI instruction by starting with established course materials, then determining which strategies to insert and where; starting with a set of strategies they wish to focus on and design activities around them; or inserting strategies spontaneously into the lessons whenever it seems appropriate (e.g., to help students overcome problems with difficult material or to speed up the lesson).

Steps for Designing Strategy Training

The approaches outlined above offer options for providing strategy training to a large number of learners. Based on the needs, resources, and time available to an institution, the next step is to plan the instruction students will receive. The following seven steps are based largely on suggestions of strategy training by Oxford (1990). The model is especially useful because it can be adapted to the needs of various groups of learners, the resources available, and the length of the strategy training. See Cohen (1998) for a thorough description of these steps.

1. Determine learners’ needs and the resources available for training.
2. Select the strategies to be taught.
3. Consider the benefits of integrated strategy training.
4. Consider motivational issues.
5. Prepare the materials and activities.
6. Conduct explicit strategy training.
7. Evaluate and revise the strategy training.

Conclusion

The guidelines for implementing strategy training programs provide a variety of options for tailoring the training to meet the needs of a large number of students, as well as to the needs of the individual institution or language program. The most important considerations in the design of a strategy training program are the students’ needs, the available resources (e.g., time, money, materials, availability of teacher trainers), and the feasibility of providing this kind of instruction.

When including strategies-based instruction in a foreign language curriculum, it is important to choose an instructional model that introduces the strategies to the students and raises awareness of their learning preferences; teaches them to identify, practice, evaluate, and transfer strategies to new learning situations; and promotes learner autonomy to enable students to continue their learning after they leave the language classroom.

Note

The information in this digest was drawn from Chapter 4 of Cohen (1998).
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References


Module 7: Learning Strategies

List of Additional Readings and Resources


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Module 8 Reading A, From Lessons to Life: Authentic Materials Bridge the Gap
Author: Maria Spelleri


Overview

Teaching ESL to adults means being awed everyday as we witness the tenacity and perseverance of immigrants carving out better lives for themselves and their families. Teachers owe it to their over-worked and often culture-shocked students to use classroom time as effectively as possible, keeping in mind that while the teacher may want to be in that classroom next year, the student hopes to have learned and moved on with his life by then. For the adult learner, the language is merely a tool, not an end in itself. Adults are driven to learn based on their needs (Knowles, 1973), and ESL teachers are in the needs fulfillment business. Fortunately for teachers, almost all adult ESL students have two similar needs: to learn English and to adapt to their new community.

Using authentic materials as teaching tools in the ESL class is one way to make effective and efficient use of adult learners' time by directly addressing their critical needs. There are many definitions in the debate over what constitutes “authentic materials” (Taylor, 1994), but here authentic materials refers to any items created for the general community and not specifically for the ESL community. Authentic materials offer real language that is contextually rich and culturally pertinent. They also provide insights into the adult learners' new community and the services and opportunities it offers.

Real Life Means High Interest

ESL learners like authentic materials. As adults, they recognize the significance of these items and how key they are to real life problems and tasks. At some levels of learning, it is impossible to separate linguistic needs from the learner's survival needs, so it makes sense to try to approach both simultaneously through authentic materials. These materials have a high interest value because of their relevance and because there are at least three layers of learning embedded within them: language learning (the structure and vocabulary), cultural insights (think about what a city government complaint form or an announcement for confidential AIDS testing say about a culture), and practical application (using the item in the way it was intended—to benefit oneself and one's family; e.g., planning a birthday party in a public park once the amenities, rules and hours of the park have been discovered.)

Focusing on items of immediate relevance and high interest may make a difference when work, family and other obligations compete with English class for the learner's time. If the adult learner is finding immediate benefit from his study, in other words, improvements in his life outside the classroom are on-going and not put off to the future, it may help reduce program drop-out rates and ease that tiresome (for both teachers and students) cycle of drop-out / re-registration.

Text books and the sheltered language they provide have their place in the classroom, but there is a gap between communicative competence as measured in text book tasks and as needed by the adult who has to fulfill his roles as employee, parent, and community member. Authentic materials can customize what text books have to make generic because of mass marketing considerations. Printed materials from the community reflect the learners' reality and bridge the gap from the classroom lesson to real life by incorporating names, places, events, and factual information that can actually be used by the learner to enrich his life, completely aside from initial benefits of language learning.

Text books don't leave sheltered language behind until the advanced level, if even then. Yet adult learners face a daily onslaught of unsheltered language that they can't always ignore. Learners have
to deal with the language of brochures, announcements, maps, forms, applications, guidelines and schedules, so they should be reckoned with in their complete, unsheltered state in the classroom. Exposure to authentic language means that prediction skills will be honed and that learners will improve their strategies for dealing with uncertainty. These skills and strategies can be spotlighted and built upon by the teacher to achieve much faster results than would naturally occur if the learner were just coming across the authentic material and unconsciously developing strategies on his own, outside of class.

The Role of the Teacher

True authentic materials are unedited and remain unsimplified in any way. They require the teacher to act as a filter, releasing the language in manageable quantities, raising or lowering the filter as needed, and ensuring the comprehensibility of the material through selection of the learning objective, the task to be accomplished, and the way the material is approached. But the teacher using authentic materials has other responsibilities, too. He must also learn how to identify authentic items, or determine their “applicability and adaptability” for classroom use (Dumitrescu, 2000). (See sidebar below).

Very importantly, the teacher is a culture guide. In fact, language may often take a back seat to culture with authentic materials, resulting in a hybrid “ESL in the content area of culture,” but as Krashen points out “comprehensible subject-matter teaching is language teaching” (1985, p. 16). Even something as innocuous as a day’s worth of junk mail illustrates how every authentic item is a conduit of cultural information: a culture of consumerism and marketing is revealed in coupons and store ads, a culture of philanthropy in requests for donations for veterans and endangered wildlife, and a culture of violence in flyers asking, “Have you seen this child?”

An unexpected role that teachers using authentic materials sometimes have to fulfill is that of sympathetic, non-judgmental listener. The frank reality of some authentic items can lead to personal disclosures or discussion of touchy topics. For example, one adult class was looking at a booklet that listed the social service agencies in their town. These included Alcoholics Anonymous, a rape crisis center, family and marriage counseling and other agencies that people turn to in times of trouble. During the lesson, learners began to talk about family members who had problems and sometimes even talked about their own problems. Despite the teacher’s attempt to steer away from personalization, it soon became clear that the learners were running the conversation and were intent on “unburdening” themselves in English. They were interested in the language needed to express their concerns and were also clearly intrigued to learn of the existence of these services.

Teaching with Authentic Materials

Once an applicable and adaptable item has been identified, the presentation of the item can be a challenge, especially for teachers or tutors with little experience or training. The following guidelines describe the components necessary for using authentic materials successfully.

• “Learner-Centered” is the Mantra. From the selection of materials, to the choice of objectives, to the tasks of learning itself, the needs and interests as well as the range of affective issues pertaining to the learners must be in the forefront. This doesn’t mean that a large portion of the input can’t be teacher-generated, in fact, with many authentic materials it has to be. But think of how the learner views the item, how the learner might want to use the item, and what tasks society expects the learner to be able to perform that pertain to that item.
• Identify an Objective. Any objective needs to be feasible within the i + 1 range of the learners,
that is, the level of language complexity just slightly beyond the learners’ current ability. The teacher also has to consider her ability to make the material comprehensible to achieve the objective at that i + 1 level. Only parts or a single “layer” of an item need be an objective for a lesson, in which case extraneous information can be disregarded.

For example, one newspaper insert on children’s summer camps in our area lists at least thirty camps, each with a paragraph of description. It also has a map, human interest sidebars, and a matrix comparing costs and schedules—an extraordinary amount of information.

A lexical objective could be to compare activities at the different camps. A “life-skill” objective could be using the map to identify camps close to each learner’s neighborhood.

A critical thinking objective would be to generate a list of questions that parents might have that are not answered in a camp description. Reading comprehension objectives don’t always have to be used with printed materials. Consider how a native speaker might use the item to become informed, enriched or review options and make choices. Having a precise objective to act as a guiding star is essential when facing such a wealth of linguistic and cultural input.

- **Concept and Context.** When using authentic materials, teachers have to determine if they are working on a concept that is new to many learners. For example, a class consisting of young mothers may be exposed to a new concept in a pamphlet on child-proofing the home. For others, using a checkbook or a two-for-one coupon is a new concept. New concepts mean there is no direct background experience to build on and the teacher will have to search laterally in the learners’ lives to build a meaningful context for the new concept.

For concepts that are already familiar, the task at hand is to develop a rich and relevant context that highlights the relationship between the authentic item and the learner’s life. This will facilitate the transfer of the learner’s existing knowledge and capabilities from his first to his second language. Time spent on context-setting is an opportunity to indirectly (or directly) pre-teach the most vital, stumbling-block vocabulary the learners are about to face so they can better concentrate on the message and usefulness of the material once they are involved in activities.

- **Make It Comprehensible.** Everything boils down to comprehensibility. If the input is not comprehended, regardless of how applicable and adaptable it is, it “appears to serve no greater purpose to the learner than does language that is never heard” (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 197). The teacher is the interpreter between the authentic material and the learner, and will likely use a repertoire of paraphrase, synonyms, quick sketches, miming and pictures to get the message across—for it is the message, not the structure, that is the focus of authentic materials. The safety net, the controlled language of the text book, is no longer available, and the only control of the authentic materials comes from the pace and “comprehensibility filtering” of the teacher and the format and objectives of the lesson.

Authentic materials become a way of life for some ESL teachers—they’re the ones grabbing all the free press from the library lobby, begging local companies for blank job applications, and swiping extra patient information forms from their doctors’ offices. These teachers have found that authentic materials are a logical and efficient way to combine their learners’ needs for language input, culture study, and information on how to access and participate in their local community. Learners can bridge the gap from lessons to life with facilitated exposure to authentic material by making immediate use of classroom lessons in their lives. Experiencing these on-going lifestyle improvements may keep the learners motivated to continue language studies.
Sample Criteria for Selecting Authentic Materials

Applicability

• The material gives the learner new information to help herself or her family. (For example, a small poster on Florida snakes from the Poison Control Center.)

or

• The material enables the learner to take advantage of an existing community service or amenity that had not been previously utilized or fully utilized. (For example, information and a schedule about children's programs at the library.)

and

• The material reflects a reality that is economically feasible for the learner. (For example, flyers for new pizza parlors and mini-golf rather than casino cruises.)
• The material respects the immigration status of the learner, whether documented or undocumented. (The undocumented immigrant should not find himself in trouble for attempting to make use of knowledge gathered from the authentic materials.)

Adaptability

The authentic material contains non-complex vocabulary: A large amount of the printed matter marketed to the general public is written at a fifth grade level while the language of items produced by public safety and social welfare offices is sometimes even simpler. And at least one of the following:

• The authentic item features pictures, diagrams, tables, etc.
• The material uses bullets, titling, subtitles or other clear separation of text.
• The material allows some learner interaction: a form to fill out, a recording to listen to, a checklist, questions to think about, etc.

References


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List of Additional Readings and Resources

Articles and Pedagogical Resources


Online Sources for Free Authentic Materials


Perhaps most importantly in today’s information age, thinking skills are viewed as crucial for educated persons to cope with a rapidly changing world. Many educators believe that specific knowledge will not be as important to tomorrow’s workers and citizens as the ability to learn and make sense of new information. —D. Gough, 1991

Introduction

Throughout history, philosophers, politicians, educators and many others have been concerned with the art and science of astute thinking. Some identify the spirit of inquiry and dialogue that characterized the golden age of ancient Greece as the beginning of this interest. Others point to the Age of Enlightenment, with its emphasis on rationality and progress (Presseisen 1986, p. 6).

In the twentieth century, the ability to engage in careful, reflective thought has been viewed in various ways: as a fundamental characteristic of an educated person, as a requirement for responsible citizenship in a democratic society, and, more recently, as an employability skill for an increasingly wide range of jobs.

Deborah Gough’s words quoted at the beginning of this report typify the current viewpoint in education about the importance of teaching today’s students to think critically and creatively. Virtually all writers on this subject discuss thinking skills in connection with the two related phenomena of modern technology and fast-paced change. Robinson, for example, states in her 1987 practicum report:

Teaching children to become effective thinkers is increasingly recognized as an immediate goal of education....If students are to function successfully in a highly technical society, then they must be equipped with lifelong learning and thinking skills necessary to acquire and process information in an ever-changing world (p. 16).

Beyth-Marom, et al. (1987) underscore this point, characterizing thinking skills as means to making good choices:

Thinking skills are necessary tools in a society characterized by rapid change, many alternatives of actions, and numerous individual and collective choices and decisions (p. 216).

The societal factors that create a need for well developed thinking skills are only part of the story, however. Another reason that educators, employers, and others call for more and better thinking skills instruction in schools is that American young people, in general, do not exhibit an impressive level of skill in critical or creative thinking. The following observation from Norris’s 1985 review is typical:

Critical thinking ability is not widespread. Most students do not score well on tests that measure ability to recognize assumptions, evaluate arguments, and appraise inferences (p. 44).

Likewise, Robinson notes that:

While the importance of cognitive development has become widespread, students’ performance on measures of higher-order thinking ability has displayed a critical need for students to develop the skills and attitudes of effective thinking (p. 13).
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There is yet another major force behind the call for improved thinking skills instruction. Educators are now generally agreed that it is in fact possible to increase students’ creative and critical thinking capacities through instruction and practice. Ristow (1988) notes that, in the past, these capacities have often been regarded as:

a fluke of nature, a genetic predisposition....qualities [that] are either possessed or not possessed by their owner and that education can do very little to develop these qualities (p. 44).

Ristow then goes on to say:

However, a great deal of the research currently being reported indicates that the direct teaching of creative skills can produce better, more creative thinkers.

Presseisen makes this point even more forcefully, asserting that:

The most basic premise in the current thinking skills movement is the notion that students CAN learn to think better if schools concentrate on teaching them HOW to do so (p. 17).

Definitions

Thinking skills. Critical thinking. Creative thinking. Higher-order thinking. Those who take an interest in this field of study soon realize that they cannot go tossing off these terms in a casual manner, since there are no universal agreements as to their precise meanings.

CRITICAL THINKING, for example, has been variously defined as:

• Reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do (Robert Ennis, quoted in Presseisen, p. 24)
• The disposition to provide evidence in support of one’s conclusions and to request evidence from others before accepting their conclusions (Hudgins and Edelman 1986, p. 333)
• The process of determining the authenticity, accuracy and worth of information or knowledge claims (Beyer 1985, p. 276).

Beyer goes on to say that “critical thinking has two important dimensions. It is both a frame of mind and a number of specific mental operations” (p. 271). Norris (1985) agrees, stating that:

Having a critical spirit is as important as thinking critically. The critical spirit requires one to think critically about all aspects of life, to think critically about one’s own thinking, and to act on the basis of what one has considered when using critical thinking skills (p. 44).

Lists of alternative definitions could also be generated for other terminology commonly used in the thinking skills literature. In an attempt to come to terms with these definitional differences, Alvino, in his 1990 “Glossary of Thinking-Skills Terms,” offers a set of definitions which are widely—though not universally—accepted by theorists and program developers. For purposes of the present report, these definitions are applicable. They include:

• BLOOM’S TAXONOMY. Popular instructional model developed by the prominent educator Benjamin Bloom. It categorizes thinking skills from the concrete to the abstract—knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. The last three are considered HIGHER-ORDER skills.
• COGNITION. The mental operations involved in thinking; the biological / neurological processes of the brain that facilitate thought.
• CREATIVE THINKING. A novel way of seeing or doing things that is characterized by four compo-
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- FLUENCY (generating many ideas), FLEXIBILITY (shifting perspective easily), ORIGINALITY (conceiving of something new), and ELABORATION (building on other ideas).
  - CRITICAL THINKING. The process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, or value of something; characterized by the ability to seek reasons and alternatives, perceive the total situation, and change one's view based on evidence. Also called “logical” thinking and “analytical” thinking.
  - INFUSION. Integrating thinking skills instruction into the regular curriculum; infused programs are commonly contrasted to SEPARATE programs, which teach thinking skills as a curriculum in itself.
  - METACOGNITION. The process of planning, assessing, and monitoring one's own thinking; the pinnacle of mental functioning.
  - THINKING SKILLS. The set of basic and advanced skills and subskills that govern a person's mental processes. These skills consist of knowledge, dispositions, and cognitive and metacognitive operations.
  - TRANSFER. The ability to apply thinking skills taught separately to any subject (p. 50).

The Thinking Skills Research

This summary is based on a review of 56 documents. Thirty-three of these are reports of research studies or reviews and are cited, with annotations, in the Key References section of the bibliography. Twenty-three are descriptive, theoretical, or guidelines documents or are concerned with research in areas other than the effectiveness of programs and practices. These reports are itemized in the General References.

Of the 33 key documents, 22 are research studies or evaluations, and 11 are reviews or syntheses of research. Subjects of these investigations include: general (or unspecified) student populations — 12 reports, elementary students — 9, secondary students — 9, and both secondary and postsecondary students — 3. The research involved regular, gifted, EMR, and Chapter 1 student populations; a representative range of racial / ethnic groups; and a balance of urban, suburban, and rural settings. Only three of the reports deal with student populations outside the United States. Five of the reports have teachers as well as students as their subjects.

The effects of many individual practices and whole programs were investigated. Many reports looked at the effects of instruction in various clusters of higher order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, together with the related skills and subskills of making predictions, making inferences, self-questioning and other metacognitive functions, formulating hypotheses, drawing conclusions, elaborating, solving problems, making decisions, identifying assumptions, determining bias, recognizing logical inconsistencies, and others.

Other reports looked at specific instructional practices, such as tutoring, using thinking skills software programs, and using advance organizers. Five were concerned with the effects of training teachers to conduct thinking skills instruction. The full thinking skills programs investigated by the research are discussed in the section on findings.

Outcome areas were likewise numerous, including student achievement as measured by assessments in the areas of reading comprehension, mathematics, general science, biology, physics, chemistry, art, social studies, and geography. Other outcome areas studied include SAT scores, commercial and locally developed higher-order thinking skills test scores, I.Q. test scores, and behavioral outcomes such as engaged time / level of participation. Research studies addressing effects on student attitudes or self-concepts were insufficient to allow for any general conclusions.
EFFECTS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES. THINKING SKILLS INSTRUCTION ENHANCES ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. A broad, general finding from the research base is that nearly all of the thinking skills programs and practices investigated were found to make a positive difference in the achievement levels of participating students. Studies which looked at achievement over time found that thinking skills instruction accelerated the learning gains of participants, and those with true or quasi-experimental designs generally found that experimental students outperformed controls to a significant degree. Reports with such findings include: Barba and Merchant 1990; Bass and Perkins 1984; Bransford, et al. 1986; Crump, Schlichter, and Palk 1988; Freseman 1990; Haller, Child, and Walberg 1988; Hansler 1985, Horton and Ryba 1986; Hudgins and Edelman 1986; Kagan 1988; Marshall 1987; Matthews 1989; MCREL 1985; Nickerson 1984; Pearson 1982; Pogrow 1988; Ristow 1988; Riding and Powell 1985, 1987; Robinson 1987; Sadowski 1984-85; Snapp and Glover 1990; Sternberg and Bhana 1986; Tenenbaum 1986; Whimbey 1985; Wong 1985; and Worsham and Austin 1983.

RESEARCH SUPPORTS INSTRUCTION IN MANY SPECIFIC SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES. Gains on learning and intelligence measures were noted in response to providing instruction in a variety of specific techniques, including:

- STUDY SKILLS, such as paraphrasing, outlining, developing cognitive maps and using advance organizers (Barba and Merchant 1990; Snapp and Glover 1990; Tierney, et al. 1989).
- INQUIRY TRAINING, in which students are given a "discrepant event" and practice information-gathering skills to resolve the discrepancy (Baum 1990; Hansler 1985; Pogrow 1988).

VARIOUS INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES ENHANCE THINKING SKILLS. In addition to instruction in specific mental operations, research also supports the use of several teaching practices as effective in fostering the development of thinking skills, including:

- REDIRECTION / PROBING / REINFORCEMENT. Known to increase students’ content knowledge, these techniques also enhance the development of critical and creative thinking skills (Cotton 1988; Pearson 1982; Robinson 1987; Tenenbaum 1986).
- LENGTHENING WAIT-TIME, i.e., the amount of time the teacher is willing to wait for a student to respond after posing a question (Cotton 1988; Hudgins and Edelman 1986; Pogrow 1988).

These practices are also associated with increases in student engaged time / level of participation (Cotton 1988; MCREL 1985; Freseman 1990).

COMPUTER-ASSISTED INSTRUCTION HELPS TO DEVELOP THINKING SKILLS. Although the approach taken differed across the various kinds of instructional software studied, all of the CAI programs designed to improve students’ thinking skills were effective. The programs focused on skill building in areas such as verbal analogies, logical reasoning, and inductive / deductive thinking. Supportive research includes Bass and Perkins (1984); Horton and Ryba (1986); Riding and Powell (1985, 1987); and Sadowski (1984-85). The computer-oriented HOTS Program originally developed for Chapter 1
elementary students also shows positive results; however, developer Stanley Pogrow (1988) notes that the heart of the program is the teacher-student interaction called for by HOTS activities.

**RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE USE OF SEVERAL SPECIFIC THINKING SKILLS PROGRAMS.** The research consulted in preparation for this report is not all-inclusive, and no doubt there are studies and evaluations supporting the effectiveness of programs other than those identified here. The following programs are cited here because they are widely known and used, are representative of the kinds of thinking skills programs in current use in schools, and have been studied by researchers. Programs found to be effective include:

- **COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MATHEMATICS PROGRAM (CSMP).** This is an elementary-level math curriculum that focuses on classification, elementary logic, and number theory. Children use computers, calculators and geometry models to pose problems, explore concepts, develop skills, and define new ideas (Baum 1990).
- **CORT (COGNITIVE RESEARCH TRUST).** Intended for use by students of any age/grade level, the program develops critical, creative, and constructive thinking skills over a three-year period (Baum 1990).
- **HOTS (HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS).** HOTS is a computer laboratory program for Chapter 1 and other elementary students. It uses readily available computer software in concert with specific teaching practices to enhance skills in metacognition, inferencing, and decontextualization, i.e., taking something learned in one setting and applying it to another (Pogrow 1988; Baum 1990).
- **INSTITUTE FOR CREATIVE EDUCATION (ICE).** ICE is a creative problem-solving process for students in grades K-12. It develops students’ ability to apply the creative thinking qualities of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration to problem-solving activities (Baum 1990).
- **INSTRUMENTAL ENRICHMENT (IE).** Upper elementary and secondary students engage in clusters of problem solving tasks and exercises that are designed to make students “active learners” and enhance their general learning ability (Baum 1990; Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **KIDS INTEREST DISCOVERY STUDY (KIDS) KITS.** Elementary schools conduct surveys of students’ interests and, based on results, students engage in active, self-directed learning and higher-level thinking around selected topics (Baum 1990).
- **ODYSSEY.** For use by upper elementary or secondary students, this program focuses on six aspects of cognitive functioning—the foundations of reasoning, understanding language, verbal reasoning, problem solving, decision making, and investigative thinking (Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN.** Designed to develop thinking and reasoning skills through classroom discussion of philosophical topics, the program is organized around six novels in which children apply philosophical thinking to their daily lives. The curriculum spans the entire K-12 range (Baum 1990; Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **PROBLEM SOLVING AND COMPREHENSION.** This program concentrates on four problem-solving components—decoding skills, vocabulary, basic arithmetic operations, and precise thinking. Students work in problem solver-listener pairs. The program is frequently used in conjunction with other thinking skills programs (Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **SAGE.** Sage is designed for gifted elementary students and extends the regular curriculum through incorporating thinking skills development activities, mini-study units, and independent study (Baum 1990).
- **SOI.** Based on Guilford’s structure-of-intellect theory, the program is organized around the development of 120 intellectual skills from foundation level to higher order and emphasizes reasoning as the key component of successful learning (Baum 1990; Sternberg and Bhana 1986).
- **TALENTS UNLIMITED (TU).** TU is designed for elementary students and helps participants develop multiple thinking skills (called “talents” in the program). Teachers receive training to instruct their students in productive thinking, decision making, planning, forecasting, communication, and knowledge base development (Crump, Schlichter, and Palk 1988; Baum 1990).
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- THINK. Secondary students engage in problem-solving activities in which they are encouraged to discuss the rationales leading to their conclusions, consider other points of view, and analyze various reasoning processes (Worsham and Austin 1983).

TRAINING TEACHERS TO TEACH THINKING SKILLS LEADS TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAINS. Developers and researchers of most of the effective programs cited above claim that teacher training is a key factor in the programs’ success. The majority of these programs have a strong teacher training component, and developers consider this training to be as important as the program content in bringing about the learning gains noted. In addition to the key role of staff development in the programs cited by reviewers Sternberg and Bhana (1986) and Baum (1990), a positive relationship between teacher training and student achievement was also identified in studies conducted by Crump, Schlichter, and Palk (1988); Hudgins and Edelman (1986); MCREL (1985); and Robinson (1987).

PROGRAMS, STRATEGIES, AND TRAINING ARE IMPORTANT, BUT... In drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of particular thinking skills instructional strategies, whole programs, or staff development approaches, several researchers also offer a caveat to those who might make curriculum decisions based on this information. Essentially, they say, yes, these programs, practices and training activities CAN BE effective, but their effectiveness is partially dependent on factors other than the methodologies themselves. In a typical expression of reservation, Sternberg and Bhana, at the conclusion of their 1986 review of several thinking skills programs, write:

...the success of a given program depends on a large number of implementation-specific factors, such as quality of teaching, administrative support, appropriateness of the program for the student population, and the extent to which the program is implemented in the intended manner” (p. 67).

Sternberg and Bhana’s observation about the match between program and student population also serves to remind us of another truism: just as there is no one certifiably “best” approach to teaching many other things, there is no one best way to teaching thinking skills. At the end of a study comparing different approaches to teaching critical thinking, Bass and Perkins write, “Like so much educational research, our fi nal results were not supportive of just one instructional technique” (p. 96).

The Controversies in Thinking Skills Instruction

Is it better to teach thinking skills to students via infused programs or separate curricula? Is it better to teach these skills directly or to create situations whereby students learn them inferentially through being placed in circumstances which call for them to apply these skills? How much classroom time is required in order for thinking skills instruction to be effective, i.e., for students to master higher-order skills and be able to transfer them to other learning contexts? Is successful thinking skills instruction partly a matter of establishing a certain classroom climate, one that is open and conducive to “thinking for oneself”?

Differences of opinion—sometimes profound ones—have been expressed by theorists, developers, and classroom teachers in response to these questions. What does the research say?

INFUSED VERSUS SEPARATE PROGRAMS. Of the demonstrably effective programs itemized above, about half are of the infused variety, and the other half are taught separately from the regular curriculum. In addition, while several documents in the thinking skills literature (e.g., Bransford, et al. 1984; Baum 1990; and Gough 1991) offer support for infusion of thinking skills activities into subjects in the regular curriculum, others (Freseman 1990; Matthews 1989; Pogrow 1988; and Baum 1990) provide support for separate thinking skills instruction. The strong support that exists for both approaches...
(in the research, not to mention in the views of warring experts) indicates that either approach can be effective. Freseman represents what is perhaps a means of reconciling these differences when he writes, at the conclusion of his 1990 study:

...thinking skills need to be taught directly before they are applied to the content areas....[I] considered the concept of teaching thinking skills directly to be of value especially when there followed immediate application to the content area...(p. 48).

In a similar vein, Bransford (1986) says:

"Blind" instruction [in which students are not helped to focus on general processes or strategies nor to understand how new concepts and strategies can function as tools for problem solving] does not usually lead to transfer to new tasks....as the instruction focuses on helping students become problem solvers who learn to recognize and monitor their approaches to particular tasks, transfer is more likely to occur (p. 69-70).

DIRECT VERSUS INFERENTIAL LEARNING. Approaches such as inquiry development and the techniques used in the HOTS program involve guiding students through the process of figuring out what strategies to apply and where those strategies can lead them. Some researchers and developers (e.g., Hansler 1985; Orr and Klein 1991; Pogrow 1988) offer evidence that this approach enables students to learn thinking skills, rather than merely learning ABOUT them. HOTS Program developer Stanley Pogrow calls the process “controlled floundering”—“floundering” because students must feel their way (along a line of reasoning, for example), but “controlled” because teachers stay with them and assist them to work through the steps of their tasks.

Others favor direct instruction in the steps of whatever thinking process the teacher wants the students to learn. Teachers using this approach typically demonstrate the process using events and ideas which are familiar to the students and then applying the same generic process to unfamiliar material, usually new content from the school curriculum. Proponents claim that many students, particularly those whose out-of-school lives have offered little exposure to higher-order thinking, cannot be expected to develop these skills inferentially and must be taught them directly. The efficacy of direct instruction in a variety of thinking skills is demonstrated in the work of Freseman (1990); Herrnstein, et al. (1986); Pearson (1982); and Wong (1985), among others.

Again, it would appear that either approach can be effective, and a blend of the two may well be most effective. Pearson, for example, favors both direct instruction and guided practice:

...I think the justification exists for placing more emphasis on direct explicit teaching, interactive discussions, substantive feedback, and control and self-monitoring strategies (p. 26).

TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR THINKING SKILLS INSTRUCTION. This topic is not so much the subject of controversy as of uncertainty; even the experts seem uncertain as to how much time should be devoted to thinking skills activities in order for students to learn those skills well. Of course, time requirements will be different for different students, and experience shows that some students become adept thinkers with no explicit instruction at all.

The research can only address the time question obliquely, since most researchers don’t design studies in which different groups of students are exposed to different amounts of instruction. What the research does show is that those commercial or locally developed programs which have made substantial differences in students’ academic performance are quite time intensive.
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Instrumental Enrichment requires three to five hours of instruction per week over approximately two years. Philosophy for Children, a K-12 curriculum, calls for three 40-minute periods weekly. Odyssey is made up of 100 45-minute lessons. Programs such as HOTS, which are designed especially for at-risk students who have limited experience in understanding and applying higher-order strategies, require even more time. Pogrow (1987) says:

It takes an extensive amount of time to produce results—at least 35 minutes a day, four days a week, for several months, for true thinking skills development to occur (p. 12).

Given these kinds of time demands, conducting meaningful thinking skills instruction clearly requires a high level of staff commitment and administrative support.

CLASSROOM CLIMATE. Research shows that positive classroom climates characterized by high expectations, teacher warmth and encouragement, pleasant physical surroundings, and so on, enhance all kinds of learning. In the thinking skills literature, there is an especially strong emphasis on the importance of climate. Orr and Klein (1991) go so far as to say that:

Teachers and administrators should systematically evaluate the general culture of their classrooms and schools and should estimate how this culture affects their ability to promote critical reasoning habits among students (p. 131).

The point made by these writers and many others is that moving beyond one’s mental habits and experimenting with new ways of looking at things—the very stuff of thinking skills instruction—involves risk. In order for students to be willing to participate in such activities, they:

...need to feel free to explore and express opinions, to examine alternative positions on controversial topics, and to justify beliefs about what is true and good, while participating in an orderly classroom discourse (Jerry Thacker, as quoted in Gough 1991, p. 5).

Here again, research can provide illumination only indirectly; however, it is the case that the validated programs in the research base include both teacher training components and classroom activities which emphasize establishing open, stimulating, supportive climates.

How might this be accomplished? Thacker lists twelve recommended teacher behaviors, all of which will be familiar to good teachers, for fostering a climate conducive to the development of thinking skills:

- Setting ground rules well in advance
- Providing well-planned activities
- Showing respect for each student
- Providing nonthreatening activities
- Being flexible
- Accepting individual differences
- Exhibiting a positive attitude
- Modeling thinking skills
- Acknowledging every response
- Allowing students to be active participants
- Creating experiences that will ensure success at least part of the time for each student
- Using a wide variety of teaching modalities (p. 5).
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Summary

Findings emerging from the thinking skills research reviewed in preparation for this report include:

• Providing students instruction in thinking skills is important for several reasons:
  1. These skills are necessary for people to have in our rapidly changing, technologically oriented world.
  2. Students, in general, do not have well-developed thinking skills.
  3. Although many people once believed that we are born either with or without creative and critical thinking abilities, research has shown that these skills are teachable and learnable.
• Instruction in thinking skills promotes intellectual growth and fosters academic achievement gains.
• Research supports providing instruction in a variety of specific creative and critical thinking skills, study techniques, and metacognitive skills.
• Instructional approaches found to promote thinking skill development include redirection, probing, and reinforcement; asking higher-order questions during classroom discussions, and lengthening wait-time during classroom questioning.
• Computer-assisted instruction is positively related to intellectual growth and achievement gains.
• Many commercially available thinking skills instructional programs have been shown to bring about improvements in students’ performance on intelligence and achievement tests.
• Training teachers to teach thinking skills is associated with student achievement gains.
• In addition to program content, classroom practices, and teacher training, the success of thinking skills instruction is also dependent upon other factors, such as administrative support and appropriate match between the students and the instructional approach selected.
• Neither infused thinking skills instruction nor separate curricula is inherently superior to the other; both can lead to improved student performance, and elements of both are often used together, with beneficial results.
• Student performance has been shown to improve as a result of both direct teaching and inferential learning of thinking skills. Again, some programs have successfully combined these approaches.
• Because thinking skills instruction requires large amounts of time in order to be effective, administrative support and schoolwide commitment are necessary for program success.
• It is especially important to establish and maintain a positive, stimulating, encouraging classroom climate for thinking skills instruction, so that students will feel free to experiment with new ideas and approaches.

In both school settings and in the world outside of school, it is crucial for people to have “skills in questioning, analyzing, comparing, contrasting, and evaluating so that [they] will not become addicted to being told what to think and do” (Freseman 1990, p. 26). Putting into practice the findings from the thinking skills research can help schools to teach these skills and students to gain and use them.

Key References

[Note from the author of this manual: The original article contained annotations for references. Due to space limitations, these have been omitted here. For more specifics, see the Web site: http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/6/cu11.html].

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Module 10: Alternative Assessment

Module 10 Reading A, ERIC Digest: Practical Ideas On Alternative Assessment For ESL Students
Author: Jo-Ellen Tannenbaum

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Overview

Many educators have come to recognize that alternative assessments are an important means of gaining a dynamic picture of students’ academic and linguistic development. “Alternative assessment refers to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of instruction and can be easily incorporated into the daily activities of the school or classroom” (Hamayan, 1995, p. 213). It is particularly useful with English as a second language students because it employs strategies that ask students to show what they can do. In contrast to traditional testing, “students are evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce” (Huerta-Macias, 1995, p. 9). Although there is no single definition of alternative assessment, the main goal is to “gather evidence about how students are approaching, processing, and completing real-life tasks in a particular domain” (Huerta-Macias, 1995, p. 9). Alternative assessments generally meet the following criteria:

• Focus is on documenting individual student growth over time, rather than comparing students with one another.
• Emphasis is on students’ strengths (what they know), rather than weaknesses (what they don’t know).
• Consideration is given to the learning styles, language proficiencies, cultural and educational backgrounds, and grade levels of students.

Alternative assessment includes a variety of measures that can be adapted for different situations. This Digest provides examples of measures that are well suited for assessing ESL students.

Nonverbal Assessment Strategies

Physical Demonstration. To express academic concepts without speech, students can point or use other gestures. They can also be asked to perform hands-on tasks or to act out vocabulary, concepts, or events. As a comprehension check in a unit on Native Americans, for example, teachers can ask students to respond with thumbs up, thumbs down, or other nonverbal signs to true or false statements or to indicate whether the teacher has grouped illustrations (of homes, food, environment, clothing, etc.) under the correct tribe name. The teacher can use a checklist to record student responses over time.

Pictorial Products. To elicit content knowledge without requiring students to speak or write, teachers can ask students to produce and manipulate drawings, dioramas, models, graphs, and charts. When studying Colonial America, for example, teachers can give students a map of the colonies and labels with the names of the colonies. Students can then attempt to place the labels in the appropriate locations. This labeling activity can be used across the curriculum with diagrams, Webs, and illustrations.

To culminate a unit on butterflies, teachers can ask beginning ESL students to illustrate, rather than explain, the life cycle of butterflies. Students can point to different parts of a butterfly on their own drawing or on a diagram as an assessment of vocabulary retention. Pictorial journals can be kept during the unit to record observations of the butterflies in the classroom or to illustrate comprehension of classroom material about types of butterflies, their habitats, and their characteristics.
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K-W-L Charts

Many teachers have success using K-W-L charts (what I know / what I want to know / what I've learned) to begin and end a unit of study, particularly in social studies and science. Before the unit, this strategy enables teachers to gain an awareness of students' background knowledge and interests. Afterward, it helps teachers assess the content material learned. K-W-L charts can be developed as a class activity or on an individual basis. For students with limited English proficiency, the chart can be completed in the first language or with illustrations.

Sample K-W-L Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln was important.</td>
<td>Why is Lincoln famous?</td>
<td>He was President of the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His face is on a penny.</td>
<td>Was he a good President?</td>
<td>He was the 16th President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He's dead now.</td>
<td>Why is he on a penny?</td>
<td>There was a war in America when Lincoln was President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think Lincoln was a President.</td>
<td>Did he have a family?</td>
<td>He let the slaves go free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He was a tall person.</td>
<td>How did he die?</td>
<td>Two of his sons died while he was still alive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before a unit of study, teachers can have students fill in the K and W columns by asking them what they know about the topic and what they would like to know by the end of the unit. This helps to keep students focused and interested during the unit and gives them a sense of accomplishment when they fill in the L column following the unit and realize that they have learned something.

Oral Performances Or Presentations

Performance-based assessments include interviews, oral reports, role plays, describing, explaining, summarizing, retelling, paraphrasing stories or text material, and so on. Oral assessments should be conducted on an ongoing basis to monitor comprehension and thinking skills.

When conducting interviews in English with students in the early stages of language development to determine English proficiency and content knowledge, teachers are advised to use visual cues as much as possible and allow for a minimal amount of English in the responses. Pierce and O’Malley (1992) suggest having students choose one or two pictures they would like to talk about and leading the students by asking questions, especially ones that elicit the use of academic language (comparing, explaining, describing, analyzing, hypothesizing, etc.) and vocabulary pertinent to the topic.

Role plays can be used across the curriculum with all grade levels and with any number of people. For example, a teacher can take on the role of a character who knows less than the students about a particular subject area. Students are motivated to convey facts or information prompted by questions from the character. This is a fun-filled way for a teacher to conduct informal assessments of students’ knowledge in any subject (Kelner, 1993).
Teachers can also ask students to use role play to express mathematical concepts. For example, a group of students can become a numerator, a denominator, a fraction line, a proper fraction, an improper fraction, and an equivalent fraction. Speaking in the first person, students can introduce themselves and their functions in relationship to one another (Kelner, 1993). Role plays can also be used in science to demonstrate concepts such as the life cycle.

In addition, role plays can serve as an alternative to traditional book reports. Students can transform themselves into a character or object from the book (Kelner, 1993). For example, a student might become Christopher Columbus, one of his sailors, or a mouse on the ship, and tell the story from that character's point of view. The other students can write interview questions to pose to the various characters.

**Oral And Written Products**

Some of the oral and written products useful for assessing ESL students' progress are content area thinking and learning logs, reading response logs, writing assignments (both structured and creative), dialogue journals, and audio or video cassettes.

Content area logs are designed to encourage the use of metacognitive strategies when students read expository text. Entries can be made on a form with these two headings: What I Understood / What I Didn’t Understand (ideas or vocabulary).

Reading response logs are used for students' written responses or reactions to a piece of literature. Students may respond to questions—some generic, some specific to the literature—that encourage critical thinking, or they may copy a brief text on one side of the page and write their reflections on the text on the other side.

Beginning ESL students often experience success when an expository writing assignment is controlled or structured. The teacher can guide students through a pre-writing stage, which includes discussion, brainstorming, Webbing, outlining, and so on. The results of pre-writing, as well as the independently written product, can be assessed.

Student writing is often motivated by content themes. Narrative stories from characters' perspectives (e.g., a sailor accompanying Christopher Columbus, an Indian who met the Pilgrims, a drop of water in the water cycle, etc.) would be valuable inclusions in a student’s writing portfolio.

Dialogue journals provide a means of interactive, ongoing correspondence between students and teachers. Students determine the choice of topics and participate at their level of English language proficiency. Beginners can draw pictures that can be labeled by the teacher.

Audio and video cassettes can be made of student oral readings, presentations, dramatics, interviews, or conferences (with teacher or peers).

**Portfolios**

Portfolios are used to collect samples of student work over time to track student development. Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) suggest that, among other things, teachers do the following: maintain anecdotal records from their reviews of portfolios and from regularly scheduled conferences with students about the work in their portfolios; keep checklists that link portfolio work with criteria that they consider integral to the type of work being collected; and devise continua of descriptors to
plot student achievement. Whatever methods teachers choose, they should reflect with students on their work, to develop students' ability to critique their own progress.

The following types of materials can be included in a portfolio:
- Audio- and videotaped recordings of readings or oral presentations.
- Writing samples such as dialogue journal entries, book reports, writing assignments (drafts or final copies), reading log entries, or other writing projects.
- Art work such as pictures or drawings, and graphs and charts.
- Conference or interview notes and anecdotal records.
- Checklists (by teacher, peers, or student).
- Tests and quizzes.

To gain multiple perspectives on students’ academic development, it is important for teachers to include more than one type of material in the portfolio.

**Conclusion**

Alternative assessment holds great promise for ESL students. Although the challenge to modify existing methods of assessment and to develop new approaches is not an easy one, the benefits for both teachers and students are great. The ideas and models presented here are intended to be adaptable, practical, and realistic for teachers who are dedicated to creating meaningful and effective assessment experiences for ESL students.

**References**


Module 10: Alternative Assessment

Module 10 Reading B, ERIC Digest: Implementing Performance Assessment in the Classroom.
Author: Amy Brualdi


Introduction

If you are like most teachers, it probably is a common practice for you to devise some sort of test to determine whether a previously taught concept has been learned before introducing something new to your students. Probably, this will be either a completion or multiple choice test. However, it is difficult to write completion or multiple choice tests that go beyond the recall level. For example, the results of an English test may indicate that a student knows each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. However, these results do not guarantee that a student will write a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Because of this, educators have advocated the use of performance-based assessments.

Performance-based assessments “represent a set of strategies for the...application of knowledge, skills, and work habits through the performance of tasks that are meaningful and engaging to students” (Hibbard and others, 1996, p. 5). This type of assessment provides teachers with information about how a child understands and applies knowledge. Also, teachers can integrate performance-based assessments into the instructional process to provide additional learning experiences for students.

The benefit of performance-based assessments are well documented. However, some teachers are hesitant to implement them in their classrooms. Commonly, this is because these teachers feel they don’t know enough about how to fairly assess a student’s performance (Airasian, 1991). Another reason for reluctance in using performance-based assessments may be previous experiences with them when the execution was unsuccessful or the results were inconclusive (Stiggins, 1994). The purpose of this digest is to outline the basic steps that you can take to plan and execute effective performance-based assessments.

Defining the Purpose of the Performance-based Assessment

In order to administer any good assessment, you must have a clearly defined purpose. Thus, you must ask yourself several important questions:
• What concept, skill, or knowledge am I trying to assess?
• What should my students know?
• At what level should my students be performing?
• What type of knowledge is being assessed: reasoning, memory, or process (Stiggins, 1994)?
• By answering these questions, you can decide what type of activity best suits your assessment needs.

Choosing the Activity

After you define the purpose of the assessment, you can make decisions concerning the activity. There are some things that you must take into account before you choose the activity: time constraints, availability of resources in the classroom, and how much data is necessary in order to make an informed decision about the quality of a student’s performance (This consideration is frequently referred to as sampling.).

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The literature distinguishes between two types of performance-based assessment activities that you can implement in your classroom: informal and formal (Airasian, 1991; Popham, 1995; Stiggins, 1994). When a student is being informally assessed, the student does not know that the assessment is taking place. As a teacher, you probably use informal performance assessments all the time. One example of something that you may assess in this manner is how children interact with other children (Stiggins, 1994). You also may use informal assessment to assess a student's typical behavior or work habits.

A student who is being formally assessed knows that you are evaluating him/her. When a student's performance is formally assessed, you may either have the student perform a task or complete a project. You can either observe the student as s/he performs specific tasks or evaluate the quality of finished products.

You must beware that not all hands-on activities can be used as performance-based assessments (Wiggins, 1993). Performance-based assessments require individuals to apply their knowledge and skills in context, not merely completing a task on cue.

Defining the Criteria

After you have determined the activity as well as what tasks will be included in the activity, you need to define which elements of the project/task you shall use to determine the success of the student's performance. Sometimes, you may be able to find these criteria in local and state curriculums or other published documents (Airasian, 1991). Although these resources may prove to be very useful to you, please note that some lists of criteria may include too many skills or concepts or may not fit your needs exactly. With this in mind, you must be certain to review criteria lists before applying any of them to your performance-based assessment.

You must develop your own criteria most of the time. When you need to do this, Airasian (1991, p. 244) suggests that you complete the following steps:

1. Identify the overall performance or task to be assessed, and perform it yourself or imagine yourself performing it.
2. List the important aspects of the performance or product.
3. Try to limit the number of performance criteria, so they can all be observed during a pupil's performance.
4. If possible, have groups of teachers think through the important behaviors included in a task.
5. Express the performance criteria in terms of observable pupil behaviors or product characteristics.
6. Don't use ambiguous words that cloud the meaning of the performance criteria.
7. Arrange the performance criteria in the order in which they are likely to be observed.

You may even wish to allow your students to participate in this process. You can do this by asking the students to name the elements of the project/task that they would use to determine how successfully it was completed (Stix, 1997).

Having clearly defined criteria will make it easier for you to remain objective during the assessment. The reason for this is the fact that you will know exactly which skills and/or concepts that you are supposed to be assessing. If your students were not already involved in the process of determining the criteria, you will usually want to share them with your students. This will help students know exactly what is expected of them.
Creating Performance Rubrics

As opposed to most traditional forms of testing, performance-based assessments don’t have clear-cut right or wrong answers. Rather, there are degrees to which a person is successful or unsuccessful. Thus, you need to evaluate the performance in a way that will allow you to take those varying degrees into consideration. This can be accomplished by creating rubrics.

A rubric is a rating system by which teachers can determine at what level of proficiency a student is able to perform a task or display knowledge of a concept. With rubrics, you can define the different levels of proficiency for each criterion. Like the process of developing criteria, you can either utilize previously developed rubrics or create your own. When using any type of rubric, you need to be certain that the rubrics are fair and simple. Also, the performance at each level must be clearly defined and accurately reflect its corresponding criterion (or subcategory) (Airasian, 1991; Popham, 1995; Stiggins, 1994).

When deciding how to communicate the varying levels of proficiency, you may wish to use impartial words instead of numerical or letter grades (Stix, 1997). For instance, you may want to use the following scale: word, sentence, page, chapter, book. However, words such as “novice,” “apprentice,” “proficient,” and “excellent” are frequently used.

As with criteria development, allowing your students to assist in the creation of rubrics may be a good learning experience for them. You can engage students in this process by showing them examples of the same task performed / project completed at different levels and discuss to what degree the different elements of the criteria were displayed. However, if your students do not help to create the different rubrics, you will probably want to share those rubrics with your students before they complete the task or project.

Assessing the Performance

Using this information, you can give feedback on a student’s performance either in the form of a narrative report or a grade. There are several different ways to record the results of performance-based assessments (Airasian, 1991; Stiggins, 1994):

• “Checklist Approach”—When you use this, you only have to indicate whether or not certain elements are present in the performances.

• “Narrative / Anecdotal Approach”—When teachers use this, they will write narrative reports of what was done during each of the performances. From these reports, teachers can determine how well their students met their standards.

• “Rating Scale Approach”—When teachers use this, they indicate to what degree the standards were met. Usually, teachers will use a numerical scale. For instance, one teacher may rate each criterion on a scale of one to five with one meaning “skill barely present” and five meaning “skill extremely well executed.”

• “Memory Approach”—When teachers use this, they observe the students performing the tasks without taking any notes. They use the information from their memory to determine whether or not the students were successful. (Please note that this approach is not recommended.) While it is a standard procedure for teachers to assess students’ performances, teachers may wish to allow students to assess them themselves. Permitting students to do this provides them with the opportunity to reflect upon the quality of their work and learn from their successes and failures.
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References and Additional Reading


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List of Additional Readings and Resources


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Module 11 Reading A, Learning Styles and Strategies
Author: Richard M. Felder and Barbara A. Soloman


Active and Reflective Learners

- Active learners tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it, discussing or applying it or explaining it to others. Reflective learners prefer to think about it quietly first.
- “Let’s try it out and see how it works” is an active learner’s phrase; “Let’s think it through first” is the reflective learner’s response.
- Active learners tend to like group work more than reflective learners, who prefer working alone.
- Sitting through lectures without getting to do anything physical but take notes is hard for both learning types, but particularly hard for active learners.

Everybody is active sometimes and reflective sometimes. Your preference for one category or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. A balance of the two is desirable. If you always act before reflecting you can jump into things prematurely and get into trouble, while if you spend too much time reflecting you may never get anything done.

How can active learners help themselves?

If you are an active learner in a class that allows little or no class time for discussion or problem-solving activities, you should try to compensate for these lacks when you study. Study in a group in which the members take turns explaining different topics to each other. Work with others to guess what you will be asked on the next test and figure out how you will answer. You will always retain information better if you find ways to do something with it.

How can reflective learners help themselves?

If you are a reflective learner in a class that allows little or not class time for thinking about new information, you should try to compensate for this lack when you study. Don’t simply read or memorize the material; stop periodically to review what you have read and to think of possible questions or applications. You might find it helpful to write short summaries of readings or class notes in your own words. Doing so may take extra time but will enable you to retain the material more effectively.

Sensing and Intuitive Learners

- Sensing learners tend to like learning facts, intuitive learners often prefer discovering possibilities and relationships.
- Sensors often like solving problems by well-established methods and dislike complications and surprises; intuitors like innovation and dislike repetition. Sensors are more likely than intuitors to resent being tested on material that has not been explicitly covered in class.
Focus on the Learner

- Sensors tend to be patient with details and good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on (laboratory) work; intuitors may be better at grasping new concepts and are often more comfortable than sensors with abstractions and mathematical formulations.
- Sensors tend to be more practical and careful than intuitors; intuitors tend to work faster and to be more innovative than sensors.
- Sensors don’t like courses that have no apparent connection to the real world; intuitors don’t like “plug-and-chug” courses that involve a lot of memorization and routine calculations.

Everybody is sensing sometimes and intuitive sometimes. Your preference for one or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. To be effective as a learner and problem solver, you need to be able to function both ways. If you overemphasize intuition, you may miss important details or make careless mistakes in calculations or hands-on work; if you overemphasize sensing, you may rely too much on memorization and familiar methods and not concentrate enough on understanding and innovative thinking.

**How can sensing learners help themselves?**

Sensors remember and understand information best if they can see how it connects to the real world. If you are in a class where most of the material is abstract and theoretical, you may have difficulty. Ask your instructor for specific examples of concepts and procedures, and find out how the concepts apply in practice. If the teacher does not provide enough specifics, try to find some in your course text or other references or by brainstorming with friends or classmates.

**How can intuitive learners help themselves?**

Many college lecture classes are aimed at intuitors. However, if you are an intuitor and you happen to be in a class that deals primarily with memorization and rote substitution in formulas, you may have trouble with boredom. Ask your instructor for interpretations or theories that link the facts, or try to find the connections yourself. You may also be prone to careless mistakes on test because you are impatient with details and don’t like repetition (as in checking your completed solutions). Take time to read the entire question before you start answering and be sure to check your results.

**Visual and Verbal Learners**

Visual learners remember best what they see: e.g., pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners get more out of words, written and spoken explanations. Everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally.

In most college classes very little visual information is presented: students mainly listen to lectures and read material written on chalkboards and in textbooks and handouts. Unfortunately, most people are visual learners, which means that most students do not get nearly as much as they would if more visual presentation were used in class. Good learners are capable of processing information presented either visually or verbally.

**How can visual learners help themselves?**

If you are a visual learner, try to find diagrams, sketches, schematics, photographs, flow charts, or any other visual representation of course material that is predominantly verbal. Ask your instructor, consult reference books, and see if any videotapes or CD-ROM displays of the course material are available. Prepare a concept map by listing key points, enclosing them in boxes or circles, and draw-
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ing lines with arrows between concepts to show connections. Color-code your notes with a highlighter so that everything relating to one topic is the same color.

How can verbal learners help themselves?

Write summaries or outlines of course material in your own words. Working in groups can be particularly effective; you gain understanding of material by hearing classmates’ explanations and you learn even more when you do the explaining.

Sequential and Global Learners

• Sequential learners tend to gain understanding in linear steps, with each step following logically from the previous one. Global learners tend to learn in large jumps, absorbing material almost randomly without seeing connections, and then suddenly “getting it.”

• Sequential learners tend to follow logical stepwise paths in finding solutions; global learners may be able to solve complex problems quickly or put things together in novel ways once they have grasped the big picture, but they may have difficulty explaining how they did it.

Many people who read this description may conclude incorrectly that they are global, since everyone has experienced bewilderment followed by a sudden flash of understanding. What makes you global or not is what happens before the light bulb goes on. Sequential learners may not fully understand the material but they can nevertheless do something with it (like solve the homework problems or pass the test) since the pieces they have absorbed are logically connected. Strongly global learners who lack good sequential thinking abilities, on the other hand, may have serious difficulties until they have the big picture. Even after they have it, they may be fuzzy about the details of the subject, while sequential learners may know a lot about specific aspects of a subject but may have trouble relating them to different aspects of the same subject or to different subjects.

How can sequential learners help themselves?

Most college courses are taught in a sequential manner. However, if you are a sequential learner and you have an instructor who jumps around from topic to topic or skips steps, you may have difficulty following and remembering. Ask the instructor to fill in the skipped steps, or fill them in yourself by consulting references. When you are studying, take the time to outline the lecture material for yourself in logical order. In the long run doing so will save you time. You might also try to strengthen your global thinking skills by relating each new topic you study to things you already know. The more you can do so, the deeper your understanding of the topic is likely to be.

How can global learners help themselves?

If you are a global learner, it can be helpful for you to realize that you need the big picture of a subject before you can master details. If your instructor plunges directly into new topics without bothering to explain how they relate to what you already know, it can cause problems for you. Fortunately, there are steps you can take that may help you get the big picture more rapidly. Before you begin to study the first section of a chapter in a text, skim through the entire chapter to get an overview. Doing so may be time-consuming initially but it may save you from going over and over individual parts later. Instead of spending a short time on every subject every night, you might find it more productive to immerse yourself in individual subjects for large blocks. Try to relate the subject to things you already know, either by asking the instructor to help you see connections or by consulting references. Above all, don’t lose faith in yourself; you will eventually understand the new material, and once you
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do your understanding of how it connects to other topics and disciplines may enable you to apply it in ways that most sequential thinkers would never dream of.

See the <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/ILSdir/styles.htm> Web site for more information about the learning styles model and implications of learning styles for instructors and students.
Module 11: Individual Learner Differences

Module 11 Reading B, ERIC Digest: Differentiation of Instruction in the Elementary Grades
Author: Carol Ann Tomlinson


Overview

In most elementary classrooms, some students struggle with learning, others perform well beyond grade-level expectations, and the rest fit somewhere in between. Within each of these categories of students, individuals also learn in a variety of ways and have different interests. To meet the needs of a diverse student population, many teachers differentiate instruction. This Digest describes differentiated instruction, discusses the reasons for differentiating instruction, discusses what makes it successful, and suggests how teachers can start implementing it.

What is Differentiated Instruction?

At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.

Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile: (1) content—what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; (2) process—activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content; (3) products—culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and (4) learning environment—the way the classroom works and feels.

Content. Examples of differentiating content at the elementary level include the following: (1) using reading materials at varying readability levels; (2) putting text materials on tape; (3) using spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students; (4) presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means; (5) using reading buddies; and (6) meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners.

Process. Examples of differentiating process or activities at the elementary level include the following: (1) using tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity; (2) providing interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them; (3) developing personal agendas (task lists written by the teacher and containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners) to be completed either during specified agenda time or as students complete other work early; (4) offering manipulative's or other hands-on supports for students who need them; and (5) varying the length of time a student may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.

Products. Examples of differentiating products at the elementary level include the following: (1) giving students options of how to express required learning (e.g., create a puppet show, write a letter, or develop a mural with labels); (2) using rubrics that match and extend students’ varied skills.
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levels; (3) allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products; and (4) encouraging
students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required ele-
ments.

Learning Environment. Examples of differentiating learning environment at the elementary level
include: (1) making sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction, as well
as places that invite student collaboration; (2) providing materials that reflect a variety of cultures
and home settings; (3) setting out clear guidelines for independent work that matches individual
needs; (4) developing routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other stu-
dents and cannot help them immediately; and (5) helping students understand that some learners
need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly (Tomlinson, 1995, 1999; Wine-

Why Differentiate Instruction in the Elementary [Primary] Grades?

A simple answer is that students in the elementary grades vary greatly, and if teachers want to
maximize their students’ individual potential, they will have to attend to the differences.

There is ample evidence that students are more successful in school and find it more satisfying if
they are taught in ways that are responsive to their readiness levels (e.g., Vygotsky, 1986), interests
(e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and learning profiles (e.g., Sternberg, Torff, & Grigorenko, 1998). Another
reason for differentiating instruction relates to teacher professionalism. Expert teachers are attentive
to students’ varied learning needs (Danielson, 1996); to differentiate instruction, then, is to become a
more competent, creative, and professional educator.

What Makes Differentiation Successful?

The most important factor in differentiation that helps students achieve more and feel more en-
gaged in school is being sure that what teachers differentiate is high-quality curriculum and instruc-
tion. For example, teachers can make sure that: (1) curriculum is clearly focused on the information
and understandings that are most valued by an expert in a particular discipline; (2) lessons, activities,
and products are designed to ensure that students grapple with, use, and come to understand those
essentials; (3) materials and tasks are interesting to students and seem relevant to them; (4) learning
is active; and (5) there is joy and satisfaction in learning for each student.

One challenge for teachers leading a differentiated classroom is the need to reflect constantly on
the quality of what is being differentiated. Developing three avenues to an ill-defined outcome is of
little use. Offering four ways to express trivia is a waste of planning time and is unlikely to produce
impressive results for learners.

There is no recipe for differentiation. Rather, it is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that
values the individual and can be translated into classroom practice in many ways. Still, the following
broad principles and characteristics are useful in establishing a defensible differentiated classroom:

• ASSESSMENT IS ONGOING AND TIGHTLY LINKED TO INSTRUCTION. Teachers are hunters and
gatherers of information about their students and how those students are learning at a given point.
Whatever the teachers can glean about student readiness, interest, and learning helps the teachers
plan next steps in instruction.

• TEACHERS WORK HARD TO ENSURE “RESPECTFUL ACTIVITIES” FOR ALL STUDENTS. Each student’s
work should be equally interesting, equally appealing, and equally focused on essential understand-
ings and skills. There should not be a group of students that frequently does “dull drill” and another that generally does “fluff.” Rather, everyone is continually working with tasks that students and teachers perceive to be worthwhile and valuable.

• FLEXIBLE GROUPING IS A HALLMARK OF THE CLASS. Teachers plan extended periods of instruction so that all students work with a variety of peers over a period of days. Sometimes students work with like-readiness peers, sometimes with mixed-readiness groups, sometimes with students who have similar interests, sometimes with students who have different interests, sometimes with peers who learn as they do, sometimes randomly, and often with the class as a whole. In addition, teachers can assign students to work groups, and sometimes students will select their own work groups. Flexible grouping allows students to see themselves in a variety of contexts and aids the teacher in “auditioning” students in different settings and with different kinds of work (Tomlinson, 1995, 1999).

What is the Best Way to Begin Differentiation?

Teachers are as different as their learners. Some teachers naturally and robustly differentiated instruction early in their careers. For other teachers, establishing a truly flexible and responsive classroom seems daunting. It is helpful for a teacher who wants to become more effective at differentiation to remember to balance his or her own needs with those of the students. Once again, there are no recipes. Nonetheless, the following guidelines are helpful to many teachers as they begin to differentiate, begin to differentiate more proactively, or seek to refine a classroom that can already be called “differentiated”:

• Frequently reflect on the match between your classroom and the philosophy of teaching and learning you want to practice. Look for matches and mismatches, and use both to guide you.

• Create a mental image of what you want your classroom to look like, and use it to help plan and assess changes.

• Prepare students and parents for a differentiated classroom so that they are your partners in making it a good fit for everyone. Be sure to talk often with students about the classroom—why it is the way it is, how it is working, and what everyone can do to help.

• Begin to change at a pace that pushes you a little bit beyond your comfort zone—neither totally duplicating past practice nor trying to change everything overnight. You might begin with just one subject, just one time of the day, or just one curricular element (content, process, product, or learning environment).

• Think carefully about management routines—for example, giving directions, making sure students know how to move about the room, and making sure students know where to put work when they finish it.

• Teach the routines to students carefully, monitor the effectiveness of the routines, discuss results with students, and fine tune together.

• Take time off from change to regain your energy and to assess how things are going.

• Build a support system of other educators. Let administrators know how they can support you. Ask specialists (e.g., in gifted education, special education, second language instruction) to co-teach.

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with you from time to time so you have a second pair of hands and eyes. Form study groups on differ-
entiation with like-minded peers. Plan and share differentiated materials with colleagues.

• Enjoy your own growth. One of the great joys of teaching is recognizing that the teacher always
has more to learn than the students and that learning is no less empowering for adults than for
students.

For More Information


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Module 11 Reading C, Teach to Students’ Learning Styles
Author: Judie Haynes


It is always important for teachers to teach to their students’ learning styles but this becomes crucial when teaching English language learners. ELLs may be highly literate in their own language but experience difficulties when acquiring English because they are accustomed to learning through a different style. Most American teachers, especially in the upper grades, teach to students with an auditory learning style. This can be very difficult for the ELLs in your class.

Auditory Learners
Students with this style will be able to recall what they hear and will prefer oral instructions. They learn by listening and talking. These students enjoy talking and interviewing. They are phonetic readers who enjoy oral reading, choral reading, and listening to recorded books. They learn best by:
• interviewing, debating
• participating in oral discussions of written material
• giving oral reports

Visual Learners
Visual learners will be able to recall what they see and will prefer written instructions. These students are sight readers who enjoy reading silently. Better yet, present information to them with a video. They will learn by observing and enjoy working with the following:
• computer graphic
• maps, graphs, charts
• diagrams
• text with a lot of pictures
• posters
• graphic organizers

Tactile Learners
Students with this strength learn best by touching. They understand directions that they write and will learn best through manipulatives. Try using the Language Experience Approach (LEA) when teaching these students to read. These students will also benefit from whole language approaches to reading. They’ll learn best by:
• drawing
• making dioramas
• following instructions to make something
• playing board games
• making models

Kinesthetic Learners
Kinesthetic learners also learn by touching or manipulating objects. They need to involve their whole body in learning. Total Physical Response is a good ESL method for them. They remember material best if they act it out. These students learn best by:
• playing games that involve their whole body
• setting up experiments
• following instructions to make something
• movement activities
• making models

Global Learners
Global learners are spontaneous and intuitive. They do not like to be bored. Information needs to be presented in an interesting manner using attractive materials. Cooperative learning strategies and holistic reading methods work well with these learners. Global learners learn best through:

Global Learners
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- choral reading
- story writing
- games
- recorded books
- computer programs
- group activities

Analytic Learners
Analytic learners plan and organize their work. They focus on details and are logical. They are phonetic readers and prefer to work individually on activity sheets. They learn best when:
- information is presented in sequential steps
- lessons are structured and teacher-directed
- goals are clear
- requirements are spelled out
Module 11: Individual Learner Differences

List of Additional Readings and Resources


Page 98      Shaping the Way We Teach English
Focus on the Learner

Module 12 Reading A,
ERIC Digest: Thematic, Communicative Language Teaching in the K-8 Classroom
Author: Mari Haas

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Introduction

Foreign language instruction for children can be enriched when teachers use thematic units that focus on content-area information, engage students in activities in which they must think critically, and provide opportunities for students to use the target language in meaningful contexts and in new and complex ways. The national standards for foreign language teaching and learning support this approach to language instruction (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

According to the standards, when teachers plan lessons they should focus on the five Cs of Communication, Culture, Connections with other disciplines, Comparisons with students' native languages and cultures, and use of the foreign language in Communities outside the classroom. Increasingly, foreign language educators are integrating the five Cs of the standards into "content-related" (Curtain & Pesola, 1994) or "theme-based" (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992) curricula. These curricula reinforce or extend the content of the regular classroom curriculum to give coherence to the language lessons. A unit on the solar system, for example, might include vocabulary that describes the attributes of the planets, which students are also learning about in English. Students might also listen to and recite a poem about the moon and the stars, compare the view of the "rabbit in the moon" found in Aztec and Asian cultures to the North American view of the "man in the moon," observe the night sky (phases of the moon and star constellations) in their area at different times of the year, and compare their observations with those of students in other parts of the world through e-mail exchanges in the target language.

Planning Thematic Units

Themes for curriculum units can be derived from many sources. Planning thematic units allows the teacher to incorporate a variety of language concepts into a topic area that is interesting and worthy of study and that gives students a reason to use the language. Teachers should choose themes that lend themselves to teaching language that will be useful for their students. Themes and lessons should integrate language, content, and culture into activities that allow students to practice the foreign language and that prepare them to use it in a variety of contexts. A focus on communication, including the interactions present in all uses of the language (for speaking, listening, reading, and writing) is essential. Students need to be able to interpret the language, express themselves in the language, and negotiate meaning in the language (Savignon, 1997).

In beginning communicative language classes, the teacher's role includes introducing vocabulary and phrases and providing comprehensible language input for the students. Visuals and manipulatives, gestures, sounds, and actions all help students understand the new vocabulary and structures. Students need opportunities to be active participants in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and practice language in communication with their teacher, their peers, and others.

Pesola (1995) developed the Framework for Curriculum Development for FLES programs, which begins with a thematic center and creates a dynamic relationship among the factors that teachers must
take into account: language in use, subject content, and culture. (See also Curtain & Pesola, 1994, for a
detailed description of the framework.) The framework highlights a set of questions to guide curricu-
lum planning:

- Who are the students in terms of learner characteristics, such as developmental level, learning
  style, and experiential background?
- What are the planned activities, and how will teachers assess students’ performance?
- How will the classroom setting affect the planned activities?
- What materials do teachers need to support the activities?
- What language functions, vocabulary, and grammatical structures will students practice through
  the activities?
- What knowledge about subject content and culture will the students gain?

Examples of Thematic Units

Three thematic units—Visiting the Farm, A German Fairy Tale, and The South American Rainforest—
are described below. They were developed by teachers who used Pesola’s framework to guide
their planning process. In each of these units, the teachers created language immersion settings in
their classrooms, planned lessons around themes that were interesting to the students, asked the
students to think critically, reinforced concepts and skills from the regular classroom, integrated
culture, and gave students many opportunities to use the target language in a variety of situations
(Haas, 1999).

Visiting the Farm

Martine’s second-grade French class focused on the farm for four weeks. The class began each day
with an activity that reviewed previously learned language. For example, one student would make
an animal sound and call on another student to say the name of the animal. As the students moved
from activity to activity, Martine gave them short time limits for specific tasks to be completed on
their own or in pairs or small groups. The students used French as they manipulated pictures and
completed assigned tasks. Activities included brainstorming a list of names of farm animals in French
that students already knew, learning new animal names in French, and drawing a farm mural on
butcher paper; singing a song about animals in the barnyard (Dans la basse cour); comparing barns in
France and the United States; planting two types of vegetables chosen from seed packets of com-
mon French vegetables; measuring and charting the plants’ growth; tasting radishes with butter (as
they are served in France); creating a labeled farm page for their book of all of the places they “vis-
ited” in class that year; sorting food by plant or animal and completing and describing a food pyra-
mid; making baguette sandwiches; comparing with a partner pictures of vocabulary words (e.g., the
animals on their farm pages, their favorite foods, the ingredients in their baguette sandwiches) with
a partner; listening to the story of the three pigs in French and creating their own versions of the tale
(e.g., the three horses and the big, bad, hungry cow), which they acted out; and taking their baguette
sandwiches with them to a fantasy picnic on the farm.

A German Fairy Tale

In this three-week unit, Frederike introduced her third-grade German students to a story based on
a Grimm’s fairy tale about a pancake (Pfannküchen) by singing the song “Ich Habe Hunger” (“I Am Hun-
gry”) with them, then preparing batter (measuring in grams) and cooking a pancake in class. Next,
pairs of students compared the sentences they had cut apart from mixed-up copies of the recipe
and resequenced them in the appropriate order. Throughout the unit, Frederike began each class by
telling or retelling part of the pancake story. “The Thick, Fat Pancake” (“Der Dicke Fette Pfannkuchen”)
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is the story of an old woman who bakes a pancake that does not want to be eaten. It jumps out of the pan and rolls through the forest. The pancake's delicious smell attracts one forest animal after another. The names of the animals describe their characteristics, such as Wolf Sharptooth (Wolf Scharfzahn) and Rabbit Longears (Haselongohr). As the animals tell the pancake to stand still so that they can eat it, each one adds another adjective to describe the pancake: “Thick, fat, dear, sweet, yummy, wonderful, golden, delicious, marvelous pancake, stand still! I want to eat you up!” At this request, the pancake laughs and waves and continues rolling down the hill. Finally, the pancake meets two hungry orphans, jumps into their laps and begs, “Eat me, I will give you strength.” The orphans then eat the pancake.

The students practiced new vocabulary by drawing pictures on the board as Frederike recited the scene and by sequencing sentences about the story using sentence strips and a pocket chart. The retellings were never boring and always included student input and probing questions that elicited information about the animals in the fairy tale. With each storytelling, Frederike emphasized different vocabulary or introduced a new animal. She also engaged the students in activities that provided practice in using German:

• copying sentences from the story and illustrating them to create personal storybooks
• listing characteristics of the animals, such as the large, sharp teeth of the wolf
• creating surnames for the animals, like Wolf Sharpooth
• playing “inside outside circles” (Kagan, 1986), with one circle of students asking questions about the story and their partners in the other circle answering
• pretending to become animals and pancakes when the teacher waved her magic wand, then role playing their actions in the story
• singing and dancing the “duck dance” and learning the parts of the animals’ bodies
• listing what the animals ate and learning the German words for carnivore, herbivore, and omnivore
• practicing reading the fairy tale to a partner
• selecting roles for a play based on the fairy tale and presenting the play for their parents and the first-grade German students
• reading their illustrated storybooks to the first graders.

The South American Rainforest

“¿Necesitamos los portafolios de español?” (Do we need our Spanish notebooks?) is one of the questions students ask as they prepare for Soledad’s fifth-grade Spanish class. Soledad begins the first class of this six-week unit on the rainforest with a song about the weather and questions about the weather outside. Soon the class is working with maps, first with Soledad asking questions about the location of various rain forests in the world, then with the students in the role of teacher, asking other students questions.

The activities that follow lead students to communicate with each other, practice their Spanish, and focus on vocabulary and structure: locating rainforests on the map using their background knowledge from social studies class; contributing to a written description of rainforests on the overhead projector; reading chorally what they have written; and playing games and singing songs that practice the names of animals and their movements. They also work in small groups to tell each other how to color the different animals, to create sentences about animal pictures, to introduce themselves as an animal to their neighbors, to create a dialog between two animals, to write their animal dialogs on chart paper and to read and role-play them, and to edit the dialogs that they have written. They learn about the layers of the rainforest and where each animal lives, what they eat, and what their body coverings are. They write and record conversations between two animals that incorporate
all of the information covered in class. They create the sounds of the rain in the rainforest through claps, snaps, and pounding feet. They write a paragraph about the rainforest and, finally, they make batidos de mango (mango shakes).

Conclusion

Although each class is different from the others in content and specific activities, all of the teachers planned interesting thematic units that included daily review of language; rich, comprehensible input in an immersion setting; and opportunities to think critically and to process language and negotiate meaning. They also involved students as active and interactive participants in a variety of activities that reflect the goals of the national standards. Although creating thematic units takes time and effort on the part of the teacher, this way of teaching engages students and provides them with a meaningful and exciting context in which to learn a new language.

References


Focus on the Learner

Module 12 Reading B, Setting Up Your Classroom
Author: Eduplace, Houghton and Mifflin


Setting Up Your Classroom

Classroom setup can dramatically affect students' attitudes toward and habits of learning. Students need an environment that is organized, stimulating, and comfortable in order to learn effectively. Creating such an environment entails arranging a practical physical layout, supplying diverse materials and supplies, and encouraging students to have a sense of belonging and ownership.

Tips for Getting Started

• Ask students where they think the different learning centers should go.
• Let students help to define what behavior is appropriate for each learning center.
• Help students learn how to behave appropriately by role-playing and practicing with them.
• Post procedures for learning centers where students can refer to them.

Arranging the Learning Centers

Take the physical features of your classroom into account when planning. As the year progresses, you can add different kinds of learning centers to fit your class's evolving needs.

• Keep computers facing away from windows to keep glare from sunlight off the screens.
• Use bookshelves to isolate different areas.
• Provide comfortable seating.
• Save space by using walls for posters, display shelves, books, and supplies.
• Build a loft to save space while creating a private spot for independent reading.
• Separate learning centers of high activity, such as the cross-curricular center, from areas like the Reading / Language Arts Center, where students need quiet.
• Set aside an area to meet with small groups. Allow enough seating for about eight students.

Arranging the Whole-Group Area

• Make sure that all students will have an unrestricted view of the chalkboard.
• Consider using a rug to mark off the area if you have a primary-grade classroom.
• Consider what whole-group activities will take place to determine how to arrange students desks. Keep in mind that arranging desks in a circle promotes discussions and small clusters of desks can double as small-group meeting areas.
• Your desk should be out of the way, but in an area where you can view the entire classroom. Set aside an off-limits zone for your records and supplies.

Learning Areas

Whole-Group Area. For whole-class lessons. This includes informal discussion, direct instruction, and student presentations. This is a good place for an Author’s Chair from which students can read their writing to the class.
Module 12: Younger Learners (K-5)

Small-Group Area. Here you can give small-group instruction or allow groups of students to gather for peer-led discussions.

Reading Area. This is a place for students to read independently or quietly with a partner. It should provide comfortable seating, a variety of books, and a quiet, secluded atmosphere.

Writing Center. Here students write independently and collaboratively. The area should contain comfortable space for writing and a variety of supplies.

Cross-Curricular Center. This is an active center where students explore relationships across different curricula, including literature, science, social studies, art, and math.

Computer Station. This area is for computer use in writing, math, reading, keyboard practice, research, telecommunications, and creative games.

Creative Arts Center. This area is where students can get involved in visual art and dramatic play. It should have a variety of art supplies, costumes, and props.

Communication Area / Post Office. This area has mail slots for students and teacher to exchange written messages and suggestions.

Listening Station. Here students listen to tapes of books, stories, songs, and poems.
Focus on the Learner

Module 12 Reading C, Transition Techniques
Author: Angela Powell

Researchers have found that elementary students spend an extraordinary amount of time not engaged in learning tasks — getting drinks, standing in line, waiting for other students, and so on. In addition to wasting academic opportunities, transition times also tend to lead to behavioral problems because students have nothing to do but wait (and as we all know, young children are notoriously bad at waiting). Consider the ideas below to help maximize the amount of time your students spend on task.

• **Keep instructions as brief as possible.** The younger your students, the less they will be able to remember. Multi-step directions are nearly impossible for many ADD and ADHD students to follow, so be mindful of their needs, as well. Sometimes it’s not that children aren’t listening or paying attention; they just can’t process everything that we have said.

• **Make sure you have your kids’ FULL attention before giving directions.** You can do a ‘hand check’, in which you say those exact words and kids raise both hands in the air, waiting for your directions (which you don’t give until you see EVERYONE’S hands). You can say, “Hands up” (kids do it), “Make them friends” (they clasp hands together in the air), “In your lap/ on your desk” (kids lower clasped hands and listen). You can say, “1,2,3, eyes on me” and even have the kids say back, “1,2, eyes on you”. You can sing a special song or recite a poem — it doesn’t have to be about transitioning, just something they know and can participate in. Use a variety of techniques if you like — but make sure you are not talking before they are listening.

• **Teach your students never to start any task before you give the signal.** If you ask them to take out a book and turn to a certain page, most will immediately start banging around in their desks for the book and won’t even hear the page number. Instead, say, ‘When I give the signal, please take out your crayons, scissors, and math workbook. Okay. ’ Your signal could be a hand gesture, bell, clicker, code word, or just ‘go’. Beware that most kids associate the word ‘go’ with a race, so if you don’t want them rushing, choose another word. My co-worker calls her signal word the “magic word” and often chooses something silly, such as ‘pepperoni’, as in, “When I say the magic word ‘pepperoni’, you will clear your desks. (Pause). Pepperoni.” [Vocabulary from current class topics also work well.]

• **Have students repeat multi-step directions back to you.** If you want the children to put away a journal and pencil and take out a library book, say so and then ask, “What two things do you need to put away? Right. And who can tell us what you need to take out?” or say to a child on the furthest end of the room, “Robert, could you repeat the directions for anyone who didn’t hear them?” Having the directions repeated by a peer is helpful because the child will likely paraphrase, giving students the opportunity to hear things in a different way, and students not sitting near you may be able to hear better if a neighbor announces them.

• **When moving from one subject to another, get the kids immediately focused on what’s coming next.** We will be learning a new vocabulary word in science today. When I give the signal, you’re going to put away your math books and look for the new word in your science books on page 64. Raise your hand as soon as you find it. [Pause to let the directions sink in]. When I give the signal, please put away your math books and take out your science texts. Okay, go’. Write “New vocab word pg. 64” on the board because some students will not be able to remember what to do after putting...
away their math books. The kids will be too busy trying to be first to discover the new word to play around in their desk or talk, and already they are getting in the science mindset.

• **Use timers, bells, and music to signal the beginning and end of activities.** You can play a specific song when it is time to clean up, or ring a bell when a group project needs to be done. Decide whether you want your students to freeze when they hear the sound and wait for directions, or immediately respond to what they heard, and teach them accordingly.

• **Have a student call kids to line up so you can get your belongings together and tend to individual student concerns.** Teach them to pick the quietest kids first. I have also found it’s best to have them pick boy-girl because most elementary kids pick everyone of their same gender first.

• **Consider teaching your students to look at the board for directions (usually a warm up) every time they enter the classroom.** Students shouldn’t sit down in their seats and start talking or playing around while they wait for you to get your stuff together, nor should you expect yourself to be ready to teach the moment you walk in the door. After recess, I often need several minutes to speak to individuals about playground problems, examine cut knees, give permission to retrieve forgotten coats, etc. I have a coat closet monitor who makes sure things are orderly in the classroom while the class files in five at a time to hang up their things and get drinks of water. They then sit down and begin their math warm-up. This frees me up to handle other duties. Ideally I would be able to just walk right in and be ready to go, but my class is generally engaged in case I can’t.

• **Every second students spend rummaging through their desks is wasted instructional time, so think ahead about what materials your kids will need for your lessons.** In a typical math lesson, my kids will need journals, math books, manipulatives, and often scissors and crayons. Because their desks are small, they don’t like to have a lot of clutter they are not using and will often sneak things back into their desk when I need them to keep the stuff out. To fix that, I try to limit how many things they need out at once, and how many times they take out and put away the same thing. Most kids start talking and become distracted whenever asked to get something out or put it away, so limit the amount of times you make that request. On days the kids won’t be using their math books, I have the warm-up on the overhead so they never have to take the book out. If they will be doing a worksheet later in the lesson, I ask the first person in from recess to pass the worksheets out face down on each desk. The kids then do their warm-up on the back instead of in their journals. This not only saves paper, but reduced the amount of times they go into their desks. This coming school year, I plan to use community supplies and nothing will be kept in desks, eliminating this problem altogether.

• **Similarly, decide if you want your kids at their desks / tables or on the floor, and move them only once.** Start on the floor and then go to desks or vice versa. If it takes two minutes to get them to the next place, and another minute or two to get them re-focused on the lesson, plus two more minutes to return the original spot and two to get re-focused, that’s eight minutes wasted. Multiply that times the amount of subjects you teach and you could easily spend 30 minutes daily moving your kids from the floor to their desks.

**Brain Breaks: The Benefits of a Structured ‘Time-Out’ for Students’ Minds**

• **Why brain breaks are needed and what research tells us.** I recently went to workshop and learned from another third grade teacher in my school system about a concept called Brain Breaks. The concept is based upon brain research proving what teachers have always known: young students have attention spans of only a few minutes and therefore need to have frequent physical
stimulation and exercise as a break. The research is often associated with Howard Gardener’s Multiple Intelligence theory and brain-based research, which is have an increasingly profound impact on what we know about how kids learn best.

• **Exercises other schools use for brain breaks.** My Internet research indicates that brain breaks seem to be used in schools primarily in the United Kingdom. The two links below explain the concept in more detail and give photographs and examples of Brain Break exercises.
  
  [http://www.alite.co.uk/brain_breaks.htm](http://www.alite.co.uk/brain_breaks.htm)
  

• **My version of brain breaks.** The version I gleamed from my colleague was different. According to her, a brain break includes classical music (there is research to suggest that certain composers, especially Mozart, used mathematical sequences in their music that cause people to perform more highly in math), unlimited drinks of water (the brain is able to ‘absorb’ new information more easily when the neuro-pathways are hydrated), and time to walk around the classroom and talk quietly with friends (a break from concentration).

I use a brain break of this sort in the afternoon between math and social studies. This five minute period is a down time for the students in which they may not read, draw, do work, or anything else that requires concentration. They relax on the couch, chat, examine things on the walls and shelf displays, come up to my desk and talk with me, etc. If anyone’s voice rises above a whisper, they go back to their seats. Because they value their Brain Breaks so highly, my students give each other the silent signal and encourage one another to stay quiet, and noise volume stays low most of the time.

• **Benefits.** I like Brain Breaks because they give me time to get my materials together for the next subject, and also because I can talk one-on-one with my students. It’s very hard to find time during the day to speak with kids as individuals, and the Brain Breaks have provided time for me to hear about lost teeth, upcoming vacations, fights with siblings, and sometimes very personal issues that the child needs to confide in an adult about.

• **Word of caution: justifying the break.** If your administration is very strict about how you manage your classroom, make a sign to put on your door that says, ‘Please do not disturb, Brain Break in progress’. The purpose of this is to convey the message that brain breaks are an important part of your daily schedule, and not a time of anarchy and unlimited free time that someone might mistakenly perceive if they were to wander in during a Brain Break. When introducing Brain Breaks to your class, teach students in simple terms about the brain research behind what they are doing so that when they relate their experiences to their parents, they can justify what was done. (We have a Brain Break after math because scientists tell us our brains need us to move around and drink water so we can be ready to learn some more). Not all students will be able to articulate that, but just using the term ‘Brain Break’ makes the time sound like the research-based activity that it is, and will help parents support you in what you’re doing.

**Cleaning Up After Lessons**

Routinely keeping the room neat CAN be the students’ responsibility! Do lots of modeling in the beginning of the year and throughout as needed. Have the class watch certain students show us how to do it. Make a class list of what a clean desk looks like, or what the classroom looks and sounds like when children are cleaning up. Be specific about what you want and teach for it.
Module 12: Younger Learners (K-5)

List of Additional Readings and Resources


Introduction

All academic institutions have to demonstrate their commitment to providing effective teaching. Peer observation has an important part to play in this process. In this article I shall look at the basic principles underlying peer observation and its value to institutions and to individual teachers.

What is peer observation?

Peer observation is the observation of teachers by teachers, usually, though not always, on a reciprocal basis.

Pairings may be mentor + novice or experienced teacher + experienced teacher. In the first case the focus will be more clearly on helping the novice to develop their teaching skills both by observing and being observed by an experienced colleague. In the second case, the objective is to provide opportunities for experienced teachers to reflect on their teaching in a calm and private environment.

Quality control or professional development?

Quality control. Peer observation may be used by an institution as part of its quality assurance procedures. In this model, teachers are asked to assess and report formally on the performance of their colleagues according to criteria set out by the institution. Observation reports form part of the ongoing evaluation of the teacher's performance and may influence decisions on promotion or tenure.

There are clear advantages to this type of peer observation. An experienced and competent teacher may be perceived by the institution as the best person to appraise his or her peers. Such a teacher is familiar with the subject, the materials, the methods and may be able to offer both practical help to a fellow teacher, at the same time demonstrating good practice for the fellow teacher to observe and incorporate into his or her own teaching.

However, there are major problems with this model. A good teacher is not necessarily a good appraiser. Unless there are very clear guidelines for the observations, supported by appropriate training for all involved, observers may record subjective and unsubstantiated judgements on their peers. These judgements may unfairly influence the institution against the teacher. This can lead to a deterioration in peer relationships. Despite these drawbacks, some American universities [and schools, universities, and institutions in other parts of the world] use peer observation as part of their quality assurance procedures.

Professional development. The model favoured by academic institutions in the UK focuses on the professional development of the observing and observed teachers, while at the same time ensuring that the institution remains uninvolved and uninformed about the outcome of the observation and the issues discussed.
Module 13: Peer Observations

The institution provides a framework for the observation, takes care of the administrative arrangements and ensures that the observations take place as agreed. The framework and objectives will vary according to whether the observations involve a novice working with an experienced teacher, or whether two experienced teachers are paired.

How should peer observation be organised?

Choosing your partner. As far as possible, pairs should have the freedom to choose their own partners. Clearly, if there is trust and respect on both sides, the outcome is likely to be more useful for both participants.

Agreeing the format of the observations. Both parties should agree on a focus for the observation in advance. The observed teacher may request feedback on a specific area of their teaching which they are finding particularly challenging or which they would value input on from a trusted colleague. The institution may have identified an area of focus for peer observation, for example the introduction of a new curriculum area or a specific area which external quality control mechanisms have revealed as needing attention, for example error correction, the teaching of pronunciation or learner training.

Background. The observer will need to be informed in advance by the observed teacher about the students in the class, the content of the lesson, and how the lesson fits into the overall structure of the course.

The observation. Normally the observer will play no active role in the lesson itself, unless an element of team teaching is agreed in advance. The observer will keep notes on the observation to refer to during feedback.

Follow-up. The observer and the observed should meet soon after the observation. The focus should be on identifying the strengths of the teaching observed as well as the sharing of practical ideas as to how the teaching might be improved. Care needs to be taken to focus only on areas agreed in advance. Where two experienced teachers are involved they should take the opportunity to reflect on the underlying rationale of their teaching, rather than more superficial issues of procedure or technique.

Confidentiality. Both parties need to be sure that their post-observation discussion and any notes on the observations will remain confidential.

What are the advantages of peer observation for teachers?

Peer observation gives teachers an opportunity to learn from each other in a non-threatening environment. Where there is no judgmental outcome and an atmosphere of trust between the participants, it is to be hoped that teachers will share ideas and suggestions openly and constructively to their mutual professional benefit.

What are the advantages of peer observation for institutions?

Institutions need to ensure that their students are being taught effectively and—equally important—consistently. Peer observation is a powerful tool for disseminating good practice throughout an experienced staff. It is also an important way of helping less experienced teachers both to improve their teaching skills and to absorb the shared values of the institution.
Teacher Development

Module 13 Reading B,
Teachers Observing Teachers: A Professional Development Tool for Every School
Author: Michele Israel


Introduction

Typically evaluative by nature, teacher observation is usually linked to classroom performance. More and more schools, however, are using observation—teachers observing teachers—as a form of professional development that improves teaching practices and student performance. In this article, Education World’s Michele Israel talks with experts about the benefits of this emerging professional development strategy. Included: The benefits of learning by observing—for the teacher, administrator, and school, plus five observation models.

Being observed in the classroom can rattle any teacher’s nerves. But, teacher observations that serve as vehicles for professional growth rather than performance evaluations have multiple benefits—for teachers, administrators, and the school.

More and more, administrators and teachers are viewing peer observation as a form of collaborative professional development. This kind of observation can yield its greatest benefits when used as a means of sharing instructional techniques and ideologies between and among teachers.

“The intention of teacher-to-teacher observation is that it be a tool for professional development and, in turn, for student learning,” Colleen Meaney, dean of faculty at Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire, told Education World.

Learning from Colleagues

Teacher observation is one model of professional learning that “is key to supporting a new vision for professional development,” explained Stephanie Hirsh, deputy executive director of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). The new vision, according to Hirsh, involves teacher teams that meet daily to study standards, plan joint lessons, examine student work, and solve common problems. Team members then apply that learning in the classroom, watching each other teach and providing regular feedback.

“The most positive benefit of teacher-to-teacher observation,” said Hirsh, “is that it makes teaching a public rather than a private act.”

Cristi Alberino echoed those thoughts. Teachers should “use one another for professional development,” said Alberino, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education and a former New York City teacher. For example, she notes, a teacher struggling with classroom management can improve his or her skills by observing a peer in a safe and inclusive learning environment. Being observed by the same peer leads to suggestions about how to handle behavior problems, as well as opportunities to share successful teaching approaches with the observer.

Teacher observation often has been built into familiar activities, such as mentoring, noted Trish Brasslow, a media specialist and mentor at Fred C. Wescott Junior High School in Westbrook, Maine. “Being a mentor and observing my peers is truly enlightening,” Brasslow told Education World. “I see
many different learning styles and I love watching student/teacher interactions. I learn a lot about teaching and what makes for a successful teacher."

“This, to me, is a very important form of professional development,” emphasized Brasslow.

**Establishing a Culture**

It is essential to effective use of the “teachers observing teachers” strategies that school administrators enable a culture that nurtures a collegial exchange of ideas and promotes a certain level of trust, explained Dennis Sparks, NSDC’s executive director. That culture is often absent when observation is associated with performance rather than professional growth.

“It’s a risky thing to have your professional practice scrutinized by colleagues,” said Sparks. “A teacher needs to have some level of trust in [the observer’s] motives and trust that the purpose of the observation is not to make the teacher look bad or to place blame, but to help.”

Most important to effective teacher observation is that it be student-focused. The emphasis needs to be on how things can be done differently in the classroom to ensure that students succeed academically, added Sparks.

Souhegan High School is an environment where a teachers-observing-teachers strategy thrives. A culture exists “where people report with pride that they ‘push’ one another professionally,” according to Meaney. Both new and veteran teachers “value collegial relationships as a means to professional development,” she said.

**Extended Professional Development**

Teacher observation should be part of a pool of professional development opportunities, Sparks told Education World. One way in which peer observation can be very effective is when teachers acquire new skills or ideas at conferences and then model those new approaches for their colleagues. That is best done through observation, said Sparks, who advocates learning in the school, rather than through “pull-out” training, such as workshops. Professional development should be job-embedded, he emphasized. That is one of the greatest benefits of teachers observing other teachers.

Joellen Killion, NSDC’s director of special projects, added that a solid repertoire of professional learning is focused on student results — standards-based, school-based, and content-specific — and includes training, study groups, action research, and observation. “Any program dependent on one delivery mode alone is not likely to produce long-term results,” she explained.

“The professional development that a teacher values depends on what he or she needs at any given time,” said Meaney. “Generally,” she added, “newcomers report greater value in peer observation than do more experienced teachers.”

“I think that I learn more from observation than from any other kind of professional development,” added Alberino, noting that reading about a particular instructional theory does not mean it can be easily applied. Observation brings actual practice to the forefront.

Dr. William Roberson, co-director of the Center of Effective Teaching and Learning concurred: “Easily, peer observation is more valuable than other forms of professional development, if the proper context is created. If done well, it is carried out in a real, practical, immediately relevant situation.”
Compare that to attending workshops or conferences in which participants remain at a certain level of abstraction from their own classrooms.”

There is no one right approach to teacher observation but, according to Dr. Sally Blake, professor of teacher education at the University of Texas at El Paso, teacher observation is most successful when the teacher and observer work together and reflect on the teaching behavior. Teacher observation is least successful when the observer spends hours watching without analysis or dialogue with the teacher. Blake suggested the following sequence of events for effective teachers-observing-teachers programs:

- **Overview.** A simple overview of the program with a focus on what the main point of observation will be.
- **Observation.** A short observation sequence.
- **Discussion.** Immediate discussion concerning the observation.
- **Reflection.** Reflection concerning how information from the sequence may be used by the observer.
- **Application.** Application of the behavior by the observer in a classroom with feedback from the teacher.

NSDC’s Hirsh agrees that there is no single approach to teacher observation, but, says that it is least successful when a peer observes a struggling teacher who doesn’t know how to benefit from the process, especially if the observer isn’t adept at identifying his or her colleagues’ needs. Teacher observation works best when expectations are clear and participants understand how to use and benefit from the process, she added.

**“Teachers Observing Teachers” Models**

A variety of approaches to teacher observation support professional growth and student achievement. The following are several of those methods:

- **Lesson Study.** In this three-pronged approach designed by Japanese educators, teachers collaboratively develop a lesson, observe it being taught to students, and then discuss and refine it.

- **Peer Coaching.** In this non-evaluative professional development strategy, educators work together to discuss and share teaching practices, observe each other’s classrooms, provide mutual support, and, in the end, enhance teaching to enrich student learning.

- **Cognitive Coaching.** Teachers are taught specific skills that involve asking questions so that the teacher observed is given the opportunity to process learning associated with teaching the lesson.

- **Critical Friends Group (CFG).** This program provides time and structure in a teacher’s schedule for professional growth linked to student learning. Each CFG is composed of eight to 12 teachers and administrators, under the guidance of at least one coach, who meet regularly to develop collaborative skills, reflect on their teaching practices, and look at student work. For more information, see the Education World article *Critical Friends Groups, Catalysts for School Change* Web site: http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin136.shtml

- **Learning Walk.** The Learning Walk, created by the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, is a process that invites participants to visit several classrooms to look at student work and classroom artifacts and to talk with students and teachers. Participants then review what they have learned in the classroom by making factual statements and posing questions about the observations.
Module 13: Peer Observations

The end result is that teachers become more reflective about their teaching practices. Professional development is always linked to The Learning Walks. For more information, see the Learning Walk Web site: http://www.instituteforlearning.org/howwk.html
List of Additional Readings and Resources


Module 14: Reflective Teaching

Module 14 Reading A, ERIC Digest: Reflective Practice and Professional Development
Author: Joan M. Ferraro

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Introduction

Reflective practice can be a beneficial process in teacher professional development, both for pre-service and in-service teachers. This digest reviews the concept, levels, techniques for, and benefits of reflective practice.

Refining the Concept

In 1987, Donald Schon introduced the concept of reflective practice as a critical process in refining one's artistry or craft in a specific discipline. Schon recommended reflective practice as a way for beginners in a discipline to recognize consonance between their own individual practices and those of successful practitioners. As defined by Schon, reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline (Schon, 1996).

After the concept of reflective practice was introduced by Schon, many schools, colleges, and departments of education began designing teacher education and professional development programs based on this concept. As the concept grew in popularity, some researchers cautioned that SCDEs that incorporated reflective practice in their teacher education programs were focusing on the process of reflective practice while sacrificing important content in teacher education (Clift et al., 1990). These researchers recommended that reflective teaching combine John Dewey’s philosophy on the moral, situational aspects of teaching with Schon’s process for a more contextual approach to the concept of reflective practice.

More recently, Boud and Walker (1998) also noted shortcomings in the way SCDEs were applying Schon’s concept of reflective practice to teacher education. They took issue with what they considered to be a “checklist” or “reflection on demand” mentality, reflection processes with no link to conceptual frameworks, a failure to encourage students to challenge teaching practices, and a need for personal disclosure that was beyond the capacity of some young teachers. Boud and Walker suggest that these weaknesses can be addressed when the teacher-coaches create an environment of trust and build a context for reflection unique to every learning situation.

Reflective practice has also been defined in terms of action research. Action research, in turn, is defined as a tool of curriculum development consisting of continuous feedback that targets specific problems in a particular school setting (Hopkins & Antes, 1990). As such, it has become a standard concept in teacher education programs. The teacher educator as researcher and role model encourages students to put theories they’ve learned into practice in their classrooms. The students bring reports of their field experiences to class and analyze their teaching strategies with their mentors and colleagues. This collaborative model of reflective practice enriches students’ personal reflections on their work and provides students with suggestions from peers on how to refine their teaching practices (Syrjala, 1996).
Teacher Development

Levels of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is used at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. Coaching and peer involvement are two aspects of reflective practice seen most often at the pre-service level. In a 1993 study of how student teachers develop the skills necessary for reflective teaching during their field experiences, Ojanen explores the role of the teacher educator as coach. Teacher educators can most effectively coach student teachers in reflective practice by using students' personal histories, dialogue journals, and small and large-group discussions about their experiences to help students reflect upon and improve their practices.

Kettle and Sellars (1996) studied the development of third-year teaching students. They analyzed the students' reflective writings and interviewed them extensively about their reflective practices. They found that the use of peer reflective groups encouraged student teachers to challenge existing theories and their own preconceived views of teaching while modeling for them a collaborative style of professional development that would be useful throughout their teaching careers.

At the level of in-service teaching, studies have shown that critical reflection upon experience continues to be an effective technique for professional development. Licklider's review of adult learning theory (1997) found that self-directness — including self-learning from experience in natural settings — is an important component of adult learning. Therefore, effective teacher professional development should involve more than occasional large-group sessions; it should include activities such as study teams and peer coaching in which teachers continuously examine their assumptions and practices.

Serving as a coach or mentor to peers is another form of reflective practice for in-service teachers. Uzat (1998) presents coaching as a realistic and systematic approach to ongoing teacher improvement through focused reflection on teaching methods. Uzat also relates the concept of coaching to self-efficacy: Teachers' beliefs that they affect students' lives as well as the school motivate them intrinsically to grow.

Incorporating Reflection into Practice

There are many successful techniques for investing teaching practice with reflection. Some of these have been mentioned above, including action research. Action research conducted in teacher education programs can be designed to engage the reflective participation of both pre-service and in-service teachers. Rearick (1997) describes the benefits of this activity for both groups, as well as for the teacher educator, as used in a professional development project at the University of Hartford. In this project, experienced teachers identified knowledge, thinking, and problem-solving techniques and decision-making processes they used in designing instruction for language arts curricula. Based on these discussions, a pre-service course agenda for teaching reading and writing was developed. Students taking the course developed portfolios, conducting their own action research in the process. These students also formed a critical learning community, developed modes of inquiry, and shared their diverse ways of valuing, knowing, and experiencing.

A review of current research indicates that portfolio development has become a favorite tool used in pre-service teacher education (Antonek, et al, 1997; Hurst et al, 1998). Portfolios encourage beginning teachers to gather in one place significant artifacts representing their professional development. They assemble materials that document their competencies. Portfolios include a reflective component, for when the teacher decides which materials to include, he or she must reflect on which teaching practices worked well and why (Hurst et al, 1998). The portfolios are modified at points throughout a teacher's career, as the teacher continues to apply learning to practice.
Furthermore, new performance-based assessments for teachers developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) include the use of portfolios. These are based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) model that enables teachers to demonstrate how their teaching relates to student learning (Weiss & Weiss, 1998).

Participation in some professional development institutes can also be a way to incorporate reflection into practice. Professional development programs need not always focus on specific teaching methods and strategies; they can also focus on teacher attitudes that affect practice. Wilhelm et al (1996) describe the curriculum of a professional development institute that offers teacher interns an opportunity to explore attitudes, develop management skills, and reflect on the ethical implications of practice in classrooms with cultural compositions vastly different from their previous experiences. By its nature, this kind of professional development institute causes teachers to step back and critically reflect not only on how they teach, but also on why they teach in a particular way.

Benefits of Reflection in Practice

The primary benefit of reflective practice for teachers is a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher. Other specific benefits noted in current literature include the validation of a teacher's ideals, beneficial challenges to tradition, the recognition of teaching as artistry, and respect for diversity in applying theory to classroom practice. Freidus (1997) describes a case study of one teacher/graduate student struggling to make sense of her beliefs and practices about what constitutes good teaching. Her initial pedagogy for teaching was based on the traditions and practices of direct teaching. Her traditional socialization into teaching made it difficult for her to understand that her views of good teaching were being challenged in her practice. But the opportunity for exploration through reflective portfolio work enabled her to acknowledge and validate what she was learning.

Conclusion

Research on effective teaching over the past two decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth (Harris 1998). Reflective practice can be a beneficial form of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teaching. By gaining a better understanding of their own individual teaching styles through reflective practice, teachers can improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

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Teacher Development


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Module 14: Reflective Teaching

Module 14 Reading B, Reflective Teaching: Exploring our Own Classroom Practice
Author: Julie Tice


Introduction

Reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it work—a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in our classroom, and by analysing and evaluating this information, we identify and explore our own practices and underlying beliefs. This may then lead to changes and improvements in our teaching.

Reflective teaching is therefore a means of professional development which begins in our classroom.

Why it is Important

Many teachers already think about their teaching and talk to colleagues about it too. You might think or tell someone that “My lesson went well” or “My students didn’t seem to understand” or “My students were so badly behaved today.”

However, without more time spent focussing on or discussing what has happened, we may tend to jump to conclusions about why things are happening. We may only notice reactions of the louder students. Reflective teaching therefore implies a more systematic process of collecting, recording and analysing our thoughts and observations, as well as those of our students, and then going onto making changes.

- If a lesson went well we can describe it and think about why it was successful.
- If the students didn’t understand a language point we introduced we need to think about what we did and why it may have been unclear.
- If students are misbehaving — what were they doing, when and why?

Beginning the Process of Reflection

You may begin a process of reflection in response to a particular problem that has arisen with one or your classes, or simply as a way of finding out more about your teaching. You may decide to focus on a particular class of students, or to look at a feature of your teaching — for example how you deal with incidents of misbehaviour or how you can encourage your students to speak more English in class.

The first step is to gather information about what happens in the class. Here are some different ways of doing this.

Teacher diary. This is the easiest way to begin a process of reflection since it is purely personal. After each lesson you write in a notebook about what happened. You may also describe your own reactions and feelings and those you observed on the part of the students. You are likely to begin to pose questions about what you have observed. Diary writing does require a certain discipline in taking the time to do it on a regular basis.
Teacher Development

Here are some suggestions for areas to focus on to help you start your diary: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/teaching_diary.pdf
[Also integrated in the Reflective Teaching Diary Questions section at the start of this module.]

**Peer observation.** Invite a colleague to come into your class to collect information about your lesson. This may be with a simple observation task or through note taking. This will relate back to the area you have identified to reflect upon. For example, you might ask your colleague to focus on which students contribute most in the lesson, what different patterns of interaction occur or how you deal with errors.

**Recording lessons.** Video or audio recordings of lessons can provide very useful information for reflection. You may do things in class you are not aware of or there may be things happening in the class that as the teacher you do not normally see.

Audio recordings can be useful for considering aspects of teacher talk.
- How much do you talk?
- What about?
- Are instructions and explanations clear?
- How much time do you allocate to student talk?
- How do you respond to student talk?

Video recordings can be useful in showing you aspects of your own behaviour.
- Where do you stand?
- Who do you speak to?
- How do you come across to the students?

**Student feedback.** You can also ask your students what they think about what goes on in the classroom. Their opinions and perceptions can add a different and valuable perspective. This can be done with simple questionnaires or learning diaries for example.

**What to Do Next**

Once you have some information recorded about what goes on in your classroom, what do you do?

**Think.** You may have noticed patterns occurring in your teaching through your observation. You may also have noticed things that you were previously unaware of. You may have been surprised by some of your students' feedback. You may already have ideas for changes to implement.

**Talk.** Just by talking about what you have discovered—to a supportive colleague or even a friend—you may be able to come up with some ideas for how to do things differently.
- If you have colleagues who also wish to develop their teaching using reflection as a tool, you can meet to discuss issues. Discussion can be based around scenarios from your own classes.
- Using a list of statements about teaching beliefs (for example, pairwork is a valuable activity in the language class or lexis is more important than grammar) you can discuss which ones you agree or disagree with, and which ones are reflected in your own teaching giving evidence from your self-observation.

**Read.** You may decide that you need to find out more about a certain area. There are plenty of Web sites for teachers of English now where you can find useful teaching ideas, or more academic articles.
There are also magazines for teachers where you can find articles on a wide range of topics. Or if you have access to a library or bookshop, there are plenty of books for English language teachers.

**Ask.** Pose questions to Web sites or magazines to get ideas from other teachers. Or if you have a local teachers’ association or other opportunities for in-service training, ask for a session on an area that interests you.

**Conclusion**

Reflective teaching is a cyclical process, because once you start to implement changes, then the reflective and evaluative cycle begins again.

- What are you doing?
- Why are you doing it?
- How effective is it?
- How are the students responding?
- How can you do it better?

As a result of your reflection you may decide to do something in a different way, or you may just decide that what you are doing is the best way. And that is what professional development is all about.
Teacher Development

List of Additional Readings and Resources


