1

What Is Communicative Language Teaching?

Perhaps the majority of language teachers today, when asked to identify the methodology they employ in their classrooms, mention "communicative" as the methodology of choice. However, when pressed to give a detailed account of what they mean by "communicative," explanations vary widely. Does communicative language teaching, or CLT, mean teaching conversation, an absence of grammar in a course, or an emphasis on open-ended discussion activities as the main features of a course? What do you understand by communicative language teaching?

Task 1

Which of the statements below do you think characterizes communicative language teaching?

1. People learn a language best when using it to do things rather than through studying how language works and practicing rules.
2. Grammar is no longer important in language teaching.
3. People learn a language through communicating in it.
4. Errors are not important in speaking a language.
5. CLT is only concerned with teaching speaking.
6. Classroom activities should be meaningful and involve real communication.
7. Dialogs are not used in CLT.
8. Both accuracy and fluency are goals in CLT.
9. CLT is usually described as a method of teaching.

Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. Let us examine each of these issues in turn.

The Goals of Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of *communicative competence*. What does this term mean? Perhaps we can clarify this term by first comparing it with the concept of *grammatical competence*. Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Grammatical competence is the focus of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning, it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication. It is the latter capacity which is understood by the term communicative competence.

Communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)

Task 2

Consider the following sentences that are all requests for someone to open a door. Imagine that the context is normal communication between two friends. Check if you think they conform to the rules of grammatical competence (GC), communicative competence (CC), or both.

	GC	**CC**
Please to opens door.	☐	☐
I want the door to be opened by you.	☐	☐
Would you be so terribly kind as to open the door for me?	☐	☐
Could you open the door?	☐	☐
To opening the door for me.	☐	☐
Would you mind opening the door?	☐	☐
The opening of the door is what I request.	☐	☐

How Learners Learn a Language

Our understanding of the processes of second language learning has changed considerably in the last 30 years and CLT is partly a response to these changes in understanding. Earlier views of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence. Language learning was viewed as a process of mechanical habit formation. Good habits are formed by having students produce correct sentences and not through making mistakes. Errors were to be avoided through controlled opportunities for production (either written or spoken). By memorizing dialogs and performing drills, the chances of making mistakes were minimized. Learning was very much seen as under the control of the teacher.

In recent years, language learning has been viewed from a very different perspective. It is seen as resulting from processes such as:

- Interaction between the learner and users of the language
- Collaborative creation of meaning
- Creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language
- Negotiation of meaning as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding
- Learning through attending to the feedback learners get when they use the language
- Paying attention to the language one hears (the input) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence
- Trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things

The Kinds of Classroom Activities That Best Facilitate Learning

With CLT began a movement away from traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills, and toward the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work. These are discussed in Chapter 3.

Task 3

Examine a classroom text, either a speaking text or a general English course book. Can you find examples of exercises that practice grammatical competence and those that practice communicative competence? Which kinds of activities predominate?

The Roles of Teachers and Learners in the Classroom

The type of classroom activities proposed in CLT also implied new roles in the classroom for teachers and learners. Learners now had to participate in classroom activities that were based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students had to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model. They were expected to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning. And teachers now had to assume the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error-free sentences, the teacher had to develop a different view of learners' errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language learning.

Task 4

What difficulties might students and teachers face because of changes in their roles in using a communicative methodology?

2 *The Background to CLT*

In planning a language course, decisions have to be made about the content of the course, including decisions about what vocabulary and grammar to teach at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels, and which skills and microskills to teach and in what sequence. Decisions about these issues belong to the field of **syllabus design** or **course design**. Decisions about how best to teach the contents of a syllabus belong to the field of **methodology**.

Language teaching has seen many changes in ideas about syllabus design and methodology in the last 50 years, and CLT prompted a rethinking of approaches to syllabus design and methodology. We may conveniently group trends in language teaching in the last 50 years into three phases:

Phase 1: traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)

Phase 2: classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s)

Phase 3: current communicative language teaching (late 1990s to the present)

Let us first consider the transition from traditional approaches to what we can refer to as classic communicative language teaching.

Phase 1: Traditional Approaches (up to the late 1960s)

As we saw in Chapter 1, traditional approaches to language teaching gave priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency. They were based on the belief that grammar could be learned through direct instruction and through a methodology that made much use of repetitive practice and drilling. The approach to the teaching of grammar was a *deductive* one: students are presented with grammar rules and then given opportunities to practice using them, as opposed to an *inductive* approach in which students are given examples of sentences containing a grammar rule and asked to work out the rule for themselves. It was assumed that language learning meant building up a large repertoire of sentences and grammatical patterns and learning to produce these accurately and quickly in the appropriate situation. Once a basic command of the language was established through oral drilling and controlled practice, the four skills were introduced, usually in the sequence of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Techniques that were often employed included memorization of dialogs, question-and-answer practice, substitution drills, and various forms of guided speaking and writing practice. Great attention to accurate pronunciation and accurate mastery of grammar was stressed from the very beginning stages of language learning, since it was assumed that if students made errors, these would quickly become a permanent part of the learner's speech.

Task 5

Do you think drills or other forms of repetitive practice should play any role in language teaching?

Methodologies based on these assumptions include **Audiolingualism** (in North America) (also known as the **Aural-Oral Method**), and the **Structural-Situational Approach** in the United Kingdom (also known as **Situational Language Teaching**). Syllabuses during this period consisted of word lists and grammar lists, graded across levels.

In a typical audiolingual lesson, the following procedures would be observed:

1. Students first hear a model dialog (either read by the teacher or on tape) containing key structures that are the focus of the lesson. They repeat each line of the dialog, individually and in chorus. The teacher pays attention to pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Correction of mistakes of pronunciation or grammar is direct and immediate. The dialog is memorized gradually, line by line. A line may be broken down into several phrases if necessary. The dialog is read aloud in chorus, one half saying one speaker's part and the other half responding. The students do not consult their book throughout this phase.
2. The dialog is adapted to the students' interest or situation, through changing certain key words or phrases. This is acted out by the students.
3. Certain key structures from the dialog are selected and used as the basis for pattern drills of different kinds. These are first practiced in chorus and then individually. Some grammatical explanation may be offered at this point, but this is kept to an absolute minimum.
4. The students may refer to their textbook, and follow-up reading, writing, or vocabulary activities based on the dialog may be introduced.
5. Follow-up activities may take place in the language laboratory, where further dialog and drill work is carried out.

(Richards and Rodgers 2001, 64–65)

In a typical lesson according to the situational approach, a three-phase sequence, known as the *P-P-P cycle,* was often employed: Presentation, Practice, Production.

Presentation: The new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it.

Practice: Students practice using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises.

Production: Students practice using the new structure in different contexts, often using their own content or information, in order to develop fluency with the new pattern.

The P-P-P lesson structure has been widely used in language teaching materials and continues in modified form to be used today. Many speaking- or grammar-based lessons in contemporary materials, for example, begin with an introductory phase in which new teaching points are presented and illustrated in some way and where the focus is on comprehension and recognition. Examples of the new teaching point are given in different contexts. This is often followed by a second phase in which the students practice using the new teaching point in a controlled context using content often provided by the teacher. The third phase is a free practice period during which students try out the teaching point in a free context and in which real or simulated communication is the focus.

The P-P-P lesson format and the assumptions on which it is based have been strongly criticized in recent years, however. Skehan (1996, p.18), for example, comments:

> The underlying theory for a P-P-P approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology.

Under the influence of CLT theory, grammar-based methodologies such as the P-P-P have given way to functional and skills-based teaching, and accuracy activities such as drill and grammar practice have been replaced by fluency activities based on interactive small-group work. This led to the emergence of a "fluency-first" pedagogy (Brumfit 1984) in which students' grammar needs are determined on the basis of performance on fluency tasks rather than predetermined by a grammatical syllabus. We can distinguish two phases in this development, which we will call *classic communicative language teaching* and *current communicative language teaching.*

Phase 2: Classic Communicative Language Teaching (1970s to 1990s)

In the 1970s, a reaction to traditional language teaching approaches began and soon spread around the world as older methods such as Audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching fell out of fashion. The centrality of grammar in language teaching and learning was questioned, since it was argued that language ability involved much more than grammatical competence. While grammatical competence was needed to produce grammatically correct sentences, attention shifted to the knowledge and skills needed to use grammar and other aspects of language appropriately for different communicative purposes such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, describing wishes and needs, and so on. What was needed in order to use language communicatively was *communicative competence*. This was a broader concept than that of grammatical competence, and as we saw in Chapter 1, included knowing what to say and how to say it appropriately based on the situation, the participants, and their roles and intentions. Traditional grammatical and vocabulary syllabuses and teaching methods did not include information of this kind. It was assumed that this kind of knowledge would be picked up informally.

The notion of communicative competence was developed within the discipline of linguistics (or more accurately, the subdiscipline of sociolinguistics) and appealed to many within the language teaching profession, who argued that communicative competence, and not simply grammatical competence, should be the goal of language teaching. The next question to be solved was, what would a syllabus that reflected the notion of communicative competence look like and what implications would it have for language teaching methodology? The result was communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching created a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement when it first appeared as a new approach to language teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, and language teachers and teaching institutions all around the world soon began to rethink their teaching, syllabuses, and classroom materials. In planning language courses within a communicative approach, grammar was no longer the starting point. New approaches to language teaching were needed.

Rather than simply specifying the grammar and vocabulary learners needed to master, it was argued that a syllabus should identify the following aspects of language use in order to be able to develop the learner's communicative competence:

1. As detailed a consideration as possible of the **purposes** for which the learner wishes to acquire the target language; for example, using English for business purposes, in the hotel industry, or for travel

2. Some idea of the **setting** in which they will want to use the target language; for example, in an office, on an airplane, or in a store
3. The socially defined **role** the learners will assume in the target language, as well as the role of their interlocutors; for example, as a traveler, as a salesperson talking to clients, or as a student in a school
4. The **communicative events** in which the learners will participate: everyday situations, vocational or professional situations, academic situations, and so on; for example, making telephone calls, engaging in casual conversation, or taking part in a meeting
5. The **language functions** involved in those events, or what the learner will be able to do with or through the language; for example, making introductions, giving explanations, or describing plans
6. The **notions** or concepts involved, or what the learner will need to be able to talk about; for example, leisure, finance, history, religion
7. The skills involved in the "knitting together" of discourse: **discourse** and **rhetorical skills**; for example, storytelling, giving an effective business presentation
8. The **variety** or varieties of the target language that will be needed, such as American, Australian, or British English, and the levels in the spoken and written language which the learners will need to reach
9. The **grammatical content** that will be needed
10. The **lexical content**, or vocabulary, that will be needed

(van Ek and Alexander 1980)

This led to two important new directions in the 1970s and 1980s – proposals for a communicative syllabus, and the ESP movement.

Proposals for a Communicative Syllabus

A traditional language syllabus usually specified the vocabulary students needed to learn and the grammatical items they should master, normally graded across levels from beginner to advanced. But what would a communicative syllabus look like?

Several new syllabus types were proposed by advocates of CLT. These included:

A skills-based syllabus: This focuses on the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and breaks each skill down into its component microskills. For example, the skill of listening might be further described in terms of the following microskills:

- Recognizing key words in conversations
- Recognizing the topic of a conversation
- Recognizing speakers' attitude toward a topic
- Recognizing time reference of an utterance
- Following speech at different rates of speed
- Identifying key information in a passage

Advocates of CLT however stressed an *integrated-skills* approach to the teaching of the skills. Since in real life the skills often occur together, they should also be linked in teaching, it was argued.

A functional syllabus: This is organized according to the functions the learner should be able to carry out in English, such as expressing likes and dislikes, offering and accepting apologies, introducing someone, and giving explanations. Communicative competence is viewed as mastery of functions needed for communication across a wide range of situations. Vocabulary and grammar are then chosen according to the functions being taught. A sequence of activities similar to the P-P-P lesson cycle is then used to present and practice the function. Functional syllabuses were often used as the basis for speaking and listening courses.

Task 6

What are some advantages and disadvantages of a skills-based syllabus and a functional syllabus?

Other syllabus types were also proposed at this time. A *notional syllabus* was one based around the content and notions a learner would need to express, and a *task syllabus* specified the tasks and activities students should carry out in the classroom. (We will examine this in more detail in Chapter 5). It was soon realized, however, that a syllabus needs to identify all the relevant components of a language, and the first widely adopted communicative syllabus developed within the framework of classic CLT was termed *Threshold Level* (Van Ek and Alexander 1980). It described the level of proficiency learners needed to attain to cross the threshold and begin real communication. The threshold syllabus hence specifies topics, functions, notions, situations, as well as grammar and vocabulary.

English for Specific Purposes

Advocates of CLT also recognized that many learners needed English in order to use it in specific occupational or educational settings. For them it would be more efficient to teach them the specific kinds of language and communicative skills needed for particular roles, (e.g., that of nurse, engineer, flight attendant, pilot, biologist, etc.) rather than just to concentrate on more general English. This led to the discipline of *needs analysis* – the use of observation, surveys, interviews, situation analysis, and analysis of language samples collected in different settings – in order to determine the kinds of communication learners would need to master if they were in specific occupational or educational roles and the language features of particular settings. The focus of needs analysis is to determine the specific characteristics of a language when it is used for specific rather than general purposes. Such differences might include:

- Differences in vocabulary choice
- Differences in grammar
- Differences in the kinds of texts commonly occurring
- Differences in functions
- Differences in the need for particular skills

ESP courses soon began to appear addressing the language needs of university students, nurses, engineers, restaurant staff, doctors, hotel staff, airline pilots, and so on.

Task 7

Imagine you were developing a course in English for tour guides. In order to carry out a needs analysis as part of the course preparation:

- Who would you contact?
- What kinds of information would you seek to obtain from each contact group?
- How would you collect information from them?

Implications for Methodology

As well as rethinking the nature of a syllabus, the new communicative approach to teaching prompted a rethinking of classroom teaching methodology. It was argued that learners learn a language through the process of communicating in it, and that communication that is meaningful to the learner provides a better opportunity for learning than through a grammar-based approach. The overarching principles of communicative language teaching methodology at this time can be summarized as follows:

- Make real communication the focus of language learning.
- Provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know.
- Be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
- Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
- Link the different skills such as speaking, reading, and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world.
- Let students induce or discover grammar rules.

In applying these principles in the classroom, new classroom techniques and activities were needed, and as we saw above, new roles for teachers and learners in the classroom. Instead of making use of activities that demanded accurate repetition and memorization of sentences and grammatical patterns, activities that required learners to negotiate meaning and to interact meaningfully were required. These activities form the focus of the next chapter.

3

Classroom Activities in Communicative Language Teaching

Since the advent of CLT, teachers and materials writers have sought to find ways of developing classroom activities that reflect the principles of a communicative methodology. This quest has continued to the present, as we shall see later in the booklet. The principles on which the first generation of CLT materials are still relevant to language teaching today, so in this chapter we will briefly review the main activity types that were one of the outcomes of CLT.

Accuracy Versus Fluency Activities

One of the goals of CLT is to develop fluency in language use. Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns.

Fluency practice can be contrasted with accuracy practice, which focuses on creating correct examples of language use. Differences between activities that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy can be summarized as follows:

Activities focusing on fluency

- Reflect natural use of language
- Focus on achieving communication
- Require meaningful use of language
- Require the use of communication strategies
- Produce language that may not be predictable
- Seek to link language use to context

Activities focusing on accuracy

- Reflect classroom use of language
- Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
- Practice language out of context
- Practice small samples of language
- Do not require meaningful communication
- Control choice of language

Task 8

Can you give examples of fluency and accuracy activities that you use in your teaching?

The following are examples of fluency activities and accuracy activities. Both make use of group work, reminding us that group work is not necessarily a fluency task (see Brumfit 1984).

Fluency Tasks

A group of students of mixed language ability carry out a role play in which they have to adopt specified roles and personalities provided for them on cue cards. These roles involve the drivers, witnesses, and the police at a collision between two cars. The language is entirely improvised by the students, though they are heavily constrained by the specified situation and characters.

The teacher and a student act out a dialog in which a customer returns a faulty object she has purchased to a department store. The clerk asks what the problem is and promises to get a refund for the customer or to replace the item. In groups, students now try to recreate the dialog using language items of their choice. They are asked to recreate what happened preserving the meaning but not necessarily the exact language. They later act out their dialogs in front of the class.

Accuracy Tasks

Students are practicing dialogs. The dialogs contain examples of falling intonation in *Wh*-questions. The class is organized in groups of three, two students practicing the dialog, and the third playing the role of monitor. The monitor checks that the others are using the correct intonation pattern and corrects them where necessary. The students rotate their roles between those reading the dialog and those monitoring. The teacher moves around listening to the groups and correcting their language where necessary.

Students in groups of three or four complete an exercise on a grammatical item, such as choosing between the past tense and the present perfect, an item which the teacher has previously presented and practiced as a whole class activity. Together students decide which grammatical form is correct and they complete the exercise. Groups take turns reading out their answers.

Teachers were recommended to use a balance of fluency activities and accuracy and to use accuracy activities to support fluency activities. Accuracy work could either come before or after fluency work. For example, based on students' performance on a fluency task, the teacher could assign accuracy work to deal with grammatical or pronunciation problems the teacher observed while students were carrying out the task. An issue that arises with fluency work, however, is whether it develops fluency at the expense of accuracy. In doing fluency tasks, the focus is on getting meanings across using any available communicative resources. This often involves a heavy dependence on vocabulary and communication strategies, and there is little motivation to use accurate grammar or pronunciation. Fluency work thus requires extra attention on the part of the teacher in terms of preparing students for a fluency task, or follow-up activities that provide feedback on language use.

While dialogs, grammar, and pronunciation drills did not usually disappear from textbooks and classroom materials at this time, they now appeared as part of a sequence of activities that moved back and forth between accuracy activities and fluency activities.

And the dynamics of classrooms also changed. Instead of a predominance of teacher-fronted teaching, teachers were encouraged to make greater use of small-group work. Pair and group activities gave learners greater opportunities to use the language and to develop fluency.

Mechanical, Meaningful, and Communicative Practice

Another useful distinction that some advocates of CLT proposed was the distinction between three different kinds of practice – mechanical, meaningful, and communicative.

Mechanical practice refers to a controlled practice activity which students can successfully carry out without necessarily understanding the language they are using. Examples of this kind of activity would be repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items.

Meaningful practice refers to an activity where language control is still provided but where students are required to make meaningful choices when carrying out practice. For example, in order to practice the use of prepositions to describe locations of places, students might be given a street map with various buildings identified in different locations. They are also given a list of prepositions such as *across from, on the corner of, near, on, next to.* They then have to answer questions such as "Where is the book shop? Where is the café?" etc. The practice is now *meaningful* because they have to respond according to the location of places on the map.

Communicative practice refers to activities where practice in using language within a real communicative context is the focus, where real information is exchanged, and where the language used is not totally predictable. For example, students might have to draw a map of their neighborhood and answer questions about the location of different places, such as the nearest bus stop, the nearest café, etc.

Exercise sequences in many CLT course books take students from mechanical, to meaningful, to communicative practice. The following exercise, for example, is found in *Passages 2* (Richards and Sandy 1998).

Superlative adjectives

Superlative adjectives usually appear before the noun they modify.

The funniest person I know is my friend Bob.
The most caring individual in our school is the custodian.

They can also occur with the noun they modify

Of all the people in my family, my Aunt Ruth is **the kindest**.
Of all my professors, Dr. Lopez is **the most inspiring**.

Superlatives are often followed by relative clauses in the present perfect.

My cousin Anita is **the most generous** person **I've ever met**.
The closest friend **I've ever had** is someone I met in elementary school.

A Complete these sentences with your own information, and add more details. Then compare with a partner.

1. One of the most inspiring people I've ever known is …
   One of the most inspiring people I've ever known is my math teacher. She encourages students to think rather than just memorize formulas and rules.

2. The most successful individual I know is …
3. Of all the people I know …. is the least self-centered.
4. The youngest person who I consider to be a hero is …
5. The most moving speaker I have ever heard is …
6. The most important role model I've ever had is …
7. Of all the friends I've ever had …. is the most understanding.
8. One of the bravest things I've eve done is …

B Use the superlative form of these adjectives to describe people you know. Write at least five sentences.

brave honest interesting smart generous inspiring kind witty

C Group work

Discuss the sentences your wrote in Exercises A and B. Ask each other follow-up questions.

A. My next-door neighbor is the bravest person I've ever met.
B. What did your neighbor do, exactly?
A. She's a firefighter, and once she saved a child from a burning building …

If students read and practice aloud the sentences in the grammar box, this constitutes mechanical practice. Exercises A and B can be regarded as meaningful practice since students now complete the sentences with their own information. Exercise C is an example of communicative practice since it is an open-ended discussion activity.

Task 9

Examine the activities in one unit of a course book. Can you find examples of activities that provide mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practice? What type of activities predominate?

The distinction between mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities is similar to that given by Littlewood (1981), who groups activities into two kinds:

Pre-communicative activities	**Communicative activities**
Structural activities	Functional communication activities
Quasi-communicative activities	Social interactional activities

Functional communication activities require students to use their language resources to overcome an information gap or solve a problem (see below). Social interactional activities require the learner to pay attention to the context and the roles of the people involved, and to attend to such things as formal versus informal language.

Information-Gap Activities

An important aspect of communication in CLT is the notion of information gap. This refers to the fact that in real communication, people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess. This is known as an information gap. More authentic communication is likely to occur in the classroom if students go beyond practice of language forms for their own sake and use their linguistic and communicative resources in order to obtain information. In so doing, they will draw available vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to complete a task. The following exercises make use of the information-gap principle:

> Students are divided into A-B pairs. The teacher has copied two sets of pictures. One set (for A students) contains a picture of a group of people. The other set (for B students) contains a similar picture but it contains a number of slight differences from the A-picture. Students must sit back to back and ask questions to try to find out how many differences there are between the two pictures.
>
> Students practice a role play in pairs. One student is given the information she/he needs to play the part of a clerk in the railway station information booth and has information on train departures, prices, etc. The other needs to obtain information on departure times, prices, etc. They role-play the interaction without looking at each other's cue cards.

Jigsaw activities

These are also based on the information-gap principle. Typically, the class is divided into groups and each group has part of the information needed to complete an activity. The class must fit the pieces together to complete the whole. In so doing, they must use their language resources to communicate meaningfully and so take part in meaningful communication practice. The following are examples of jigsaw activities:

The teacher plays a recording in which three people with different points of view discuss their opinions on a topic of interest. The teacher prepares three different listening tasks, one focusing on each of the three speaker's points of view. Students are divided into three groups and each group listens and takes notes on one of the three speaker's opinions. Students are then rearranged into groups containing a student from groups A, B, and C. They now role-play the discussion using the information they obtained.

The teacher takes a narrative and divides it into twenty sections (or as many sections as there are students in the class). Each student gets one section of the story. Students must then move around the class, and by listening to each section read aloud, decide where in the story their section belongs. Eventually the students have to put the entire story together in the correct sequence.

Other Activity Types in CLT

Many other activity types have been used in CLT, including the following:

Task-completion activities: puzzles, games, map-reading, and other kinds of classroom tasks in which the focus is on using one's language resources to complete a task.

Information-gathering activities: student-conducted surveys, interviews, and searches in which students are required to use their linguistic resources to collect information.

Opinion-sharing activities: activities in which students compare values, opinions, or beliefs, such as a ranking task in which students list six qualities in order of importance that they might consider in choosing a date or spouse.

Information-transfer activities: These require learners to take information that is presented in one form, and represent it in a different form. For example, they may read instructions on how to get from A to B, and then draw a map showing the sequence, or they may read information about a subject and then represent it as a graph.

Reasoning-gap activities: These involve deriving some new information from given information through the process of inference, practical reasoning, etc. For example, working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables.

Role plays: activities in which students are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues.

Emphasis on Pair and Group Work

Most of the activities discussed above reflect an important aspect of classroom tasks in CLT, namely that they are designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups. Through completing activities in this way, it is argued, learners will obtain several benefits:

- They can learn from hearing the language used by other members of the group.
- They will produce a greater amount of language than they would use in teacher-fronted activities.
- Their motivational level is likely to increase.
- They will have the chance to develop fluency.

Teaching and classroom materials today consequently make use of a wide variety of small-group activities.

Task 10

What are some advantages and limitations of pair and group work in the language classroom?

The Push for Authenticity

Since the language classroom is intended as a preparation for survival in the real world and since real communication is a defining characteristic of CLT, an issue which soon emerged was the relationship between classroom activities and real life. Some argued that classroom activities should as far as possible mirror the real world and use real world or "authentic" sources as the basis for classroom learning. Clarke and Silberstein (1977, 51) thus argued:

> Classroom activities should parallel the "real world" as closely as possible. Since language is a tool of communication, methods and materials should concentrate on the message and not the medium. The purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life.

Arguments in favor of the use of authentic materials include:

- They provide cultural information about the target language.
- They provide exposure to real language.
- They relate more closely to learners' needs.
- They support a more creative approach to teaching.

Others (e.g., Widdowson 1987) argued that it is not important if classroom materials themselves are derived from authentic texts and other forms of input, as long as the learning processes they facilitated were authentic. Critics of the case for authentic materials point out that:

- Created materials can also be motivating for learners.
- Created materials may be superior to authentic materials because they are generally built around a graded syllabus.
- Authentic materials often contain difficult and irrelevant language.
- Using authentic materials is a burden for teachers.

However, since the advent of CLT, textbooks and other teaching materials have taken on a much more "authentic" look; reading passages are designed to look like magazine articles (if they are not in fact adapted from magazine articles) and textbooks are designed to a similar standard of production as real world sources such as popular magazines.

Task 11

How useful do you think authentic materials are in the classroom? What difficulties arise in using authentic materials?

4

Current Trends in Communicative Language Teaching

Since the 1990s, the communicative approach has been widely implemented. Because it describes a set of very general principles grounded in the notion of communicative competence as the goal of second and foreign language teaching, and a communicative syllabus and methodology as the way of achieving this goal, communicative language teaching has continued to evolve as our understanding of the processes of second language learning has developed. Current communicative language teaching theory and practice thus draws on a number of different educational paradigms and traditions. And since it draws on a number of diverse sources, there is no single or agreed upon set of practices that characterize current communicative language teaching. Rather, communicative language teaching today refers to a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals, and so on. The following core assumptions or variants of them underlie current practices in communicative language teaching.

Ten Core Assumptions of Current Communicative Language Teaching

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language, and trial and error. Although errors are a normal

product of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.

7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

Task 12

What are the implications of the principles above for teaching in your teaching context? Do you have other principles that support your teaching?

Current approaches to methodology draw on earlier traditions in communicative language teaching and continue to make reference to some extent to traditional approaches. Thus classroom activities typically have some of the following characteristics:

- They seek to develop students' communicative competence through linking grammatical development to the ability to communicate. Hence, grammar is not taught in isolation but often arises out of a communicative task, thus creating a need for specific items of grammar. Students might carry out a task and then reflect on some of the linguistic characteristics of their performance.
- They create the need for communication, interaction, and negotiation of meaning through the use of activities such as problem solving, information sharing, and role play.
- They provide opportunities for both inductive as well as deductive learning of grammar.
- They make use of content that connects to students' lives and interests.
- They allow students to personalize learning by applying what they have learned to their own lives.

- Classroom materials typically make use of authentic texts to create interest and to provide valid models of language.

Approaches to language teaching today seek to capture the rich view of language and language learning assumed by a communicative view of language. Jacobs and Farrell (2003) see the shift toward CLT as marking a paradigm shift in our thinking about teachers, learning, and teaching. They identify key components of this shift as follows:

1. Focusing greater attention on the role of learners rather than the external stimuli learners are receiving from their environment. Thus, the center of attention shifts from the teacher to the student. This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction.
2. Focusing greater attention on the learning process rather than the products that learners produce. This shift is known as the move from product-oriented to process-oriented instruction.
3. Focusing greater attention on the social nature of learning rather than on students as separate, decontextualized individuals
4. Focusing greater attention on diversity among learners and viewing these difference not as impediments to learning but as resources to be recognized, catered to, and appreciated. This shift is known as the study of individual differences.
5. In research and theory-building, focusing greater attention on the views of those internal to the classroom rather than solely valuing the views of those who come from outside to study classrooms, investigate and evaluate what goes on there, and engage in theorizing about it. This shift is associated with such innovations as qualitative research, which highlights the subjective and affective, the participants' insider views, and the uniqueness of each context.
6. Along with this emphasis on context comes the idea of connecting the school with the world beyond as means of promoting holistic learning.
7. Helping students to understand the purpose of learning and develop their own purpose
8. A whole-to-part orientation instead of a part-to-whole approach. This involves such approaches as beginning with meaningful whole text and then helping students understand the various features that enable texts to function, e.g., the choice of words and the text's organizational structure.

9. An emphasis on the importance of meaning rather than drills and other forms of rote learning
10. A view of learning as a lifelong process rather than something done to prepare students for an exam

Jacobs and Farrell suggest that the CLT paradigm shift outlined above has led to eight major changes in approaches to language teaching. These changes are:

1. **Learner autonomy:** Giving learners greater choice over their own learning, both in terms of the content of learning as well as processes they might employ. The use of small groups is one example of this, as well as the use of self-assessment.
2. **The social nature of learning:** Learning is not an individual, private activity, but a social one that depends upon interaction with others. The movement known as cooperative learning reflects this viewpoint.
3. **Curricular integration:** The connection between different strands of the curriculum is emphasized, so that English is not seen as a stand-alone subject but is linked to other subjects in the curriculum. Text-based learning (see below) reflects this approach, and seeks to develop fluency in text types that can be used across the curriculum. Project work in language teaching also requires students to explore issues outside of the language classroom.
4. **Focus on meaning:** Meaning is viewed as the driving force of learning. Content-based teaching reflects this view and seeks to make the exploration of meaning through content the core of language learning activities (see Chapter 5).
5. **Diversity:** Learners learn in different ways and have different strengths. Teaching needs to take these differences into account rather than try to force students into a single mold. In language teaching, this has led to an emphasis on developing students' use and awareness of learning strategies.
6. **Thinking skills:** Language should serve as a means of developing higher-order thinking skills, also known as *critical* and *creative thinking*. In language teaching, this means that students do not learn language for its own sake but in order to develop and apply their thinking skills in situations that go beyond the language classroom.
7. **Alternative assessment:** New forms of assessment are needed to replace traditional multiple-choice and other items that test lower-order skills. Multiple forms of assessment (e.g.,

observation, interviews, journals, portfolios) can be used to build a comprehensive picture of what students can do in a second language.

8. **Teachers as co-learners:** The teacher is viewed as a facilitator who is constantly trying out different alternatives, i.e., learning through doing. In language teaching, this has led to an interest in action research and other forms of classroom investigation.

These changes in thinking have not led to the development of a single model of CLT that can be applied in all settings. Rather, a number of different language teaching approaches have emerged which reflect different responses to the issues identified above. While there is no single syllabus model that has been universally accepted, a language syllabus today needs to include systematic coverage of the many different components of communicative competence, including language skills, content, grammar, vocabulary, and functions.

Different syllabus types within a communicative orientation to language teaching employ different routes to developing communicative competence. We will now examine some of the different approaches that are currently in use around the world and which can be viewed as falling within the general framework of communicative language teaching.

Task 13

How have the eight changes discussed by Farrell and Jacobs influenced language teaching practices in your school or district?

Content refers to the information or subject matter that we learn or communicate through language rather than the language used to convey it. Of course, any language lesson involves content, whether it be a grammar lesson, a reading lesson, or any other kind of lesson. Content of some sort has to be the vehicle which holds the lesson or the exercise together, but in traditional approaches to language teaching, content is selected *after* other decisions have been made. In other words grammar, texts, skills, functions, etc., are the starting point in planning the lesson or the course book and after these decisions have been made, content is selected. For example, a lesson may be planned around the present perfect tense. Once this decision has been made, decisions about the context or content for practicing the form will be decided. Content-based teaching starts from a different starting point. Decisions about content are made first, and other kinds of decisions concerning grammar, skills, functions, etc., are made later.

Content-based instruction is based on the following assumptions about language learning:

- People learn a language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself.
- CBI better reflects learners' needs for learning a second language.
- Content provides a coherent framework that can be used to link and develop all of the language skills.

Content-based instruction can be used as the framework for a unit of work, as the guiding principle for an entire course, as a course that prepares students for mainstreaming, as the rationale for the use of English as a medium for teaching some school subjects in an EFL setting, and as the framework for commercial EFL/ESL materials.

As the framework for a unit of work: Content-based instruction need not be the framework for an entire curriculum but can be used in conjunction with any type of curriculum. For example, in a business communication course a teacher may prepare a unit of work on the theme of sales and marketing. The teacher, in conjunction with a sales and marketing specialist, first identifies key topics and issues in the area of sales and marketing to provide the framework for the course. A variety of lessons are then developed focusing on reading, oral presentation skills, group discussion, grammar, and report writing, all of which are developed out of the themes and topics which form the basis of the course.

As the guiding principle for an entire course: Many university students in an EFL context are required to take one or two semesters of English in their first year at a university. Typically, a mainstream, multiskilled course book is chosen as the basis for such a course and the course covers the topics that occur in the book. Any topics that occur are simply incidental to practicing the four skills, etc., of the course book. Such courses, however, are sometimes organized around content. At one European university, for example, the first-year English course consists of a sequence of modules spread over the academic year. The topics covered are:

1. drugs
2. religious persuasion
3. advertising
4. AIDS
5. immigration
6. Native Americans
7. modern architecture
8. microchip technology
9. ecology
10. alternative energy
11. nuclear energy
12. Dracula in novels and films
13. professional ethics

The topics are chosen so that they provide a framework around which language skills, vocabulary, and grammar can be developed in parallel.

As a course that prepares students for mainstreaming: Many courses for immigrant children in English-speaking countries are organized around a CBI framework. For example, non-English-background children in schools in Australia and New Zealand are usually offered an intensive language course to prepare them to follow the regular school curriculum with other children. Such a course might be organized around a CBI approach. An example of this approach is described by Wu (1996) in a program prepared for ESL students in an Australian high school. Topics from a range of mainstream subjects were chosen as the basis for the course and to provide a transition to mainstream classes. Topics were chosen primarily to cater to the widest variety of students' needs and interests. Linguistic appropriateness was another factor taken into account. Topics that fulfilled these criteria include multiculturalism, the nuclear age, sports, the Green movement, street kids, and teenage smoking.

As the rationale for the use of English as a medium for teaching some school subjects: A logical extension of the CBI philosophy is to teach some school subjects entirely in English. For example, in Malaysia, where the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia (i.e., Malay), a decision was recently taken to use English as the medium of instruction for math and science in primary school and also for some courses at the university level. When the entire school curriculum is taught through a foreign language, this is sometimes known as *immersion education,* an approach that has been used for many years in part of English-speaking Canada. Parents from English-speaking families in some parts of Canada can thus opt to send their children to schools where French is the medium of instruction. This approach seeks to produce children who are bilingual in French and English, since they acquire English both at home and in the community.

Defining Critical Thinking

Critical thinking...the awakening of the intellect to the study of itself.

Critical thinking is a rich concept that has been developing throughout the past 2500 years. The term "critical thinking" has its roots in the mid-late 20th century. We offer here overlapping definitions, together which form a substantive, transdisciplinary conception of critical thinking.

Critical Thinking as Defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, 1987

A statement by Michael Scriven & Richard Paul, presented at the 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform, Summer 1987.

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

It entails the examination of those structures or elements of thought implicit in all reasoning: purpose, problem, or question-at-issue; assumptions; concepts; empirical grounding; reasoning leading to conclusions; implications and consequences; objections from alternative viewpoints; and frame of reference. Critical thinking — in being responsive to variable subject matter, issues, and purposes — is incorporated in a family of interwoven modes of thinking, among them: scientific thinking, mathematical thinking, historical thinking, anthropological thinking, economic thinking, moral thinking, and philosophical thinking.

Critical thinking can be seen as having two components: 1) a set of information and belief generating and processing skills, and 2) the habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior. It is thus to be contrasted with: 1) the mere acquisition and retention of information alone, because it involves a particular way in which information is sought and treated; 2) the mere possession of a set of skills, because it involves the continual use of them; and 3) the mere use of those skills ("as an exercise") without acceptance of their results.

Critical thinking varies according to the motivation underlying it. When grounded in selfish motives, it is often manifested in the skillful manipulation of ideas in service of one’s own, or one's groups’, vested interest. As such it is typically intellectually flawed, however pragmatically successful it might be. When grounded in fairmindedness and intellectual integrity, it is typically of a higher order intellectually, though subject to the charge of "idealism" by those habituated to its selfish use.

Critical thinking of any kind is never universal in any individual; everyone is subject to episodes of undisciplined or irrational thought. Its quality is therefore typically a matter of degree and dependent on, among other things, the quality and depth of experience in a given domain of thinking or with respect to a particular class of questions. No one is a critical thinker through-and-through, but only to such-and-such a degree, with such-and-such insights and blind spots, subject to such-and-such tendencies towards self-delusion. For this reason, the development of critical thinking skills and dispositions is a life-long endeavor.

Another Brief Conceptualization of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. People who think critically consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathically. They are keenly aware of the inherently flawed nature of human thinking when left unchecked. They strive to diminish the power of their egocentric and sociocentric tendencies. They use the intellectual tools that critical thinking offers – concepts and principles that enable them to analyze, assess, and improve thinking. They work diligently to develop the intellectual virtues of intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual civility, intellectual empathy, intellectual sense of justice and confidence in reason. They realize that no matter how skilled they are as thinkers, they can always improve their reasoning abilities and they will at times fall prey to mistakes in reasoning, human irrationality, prejudices, biases, distortions, uncritically accepted social rules and taboos, self-interest, and vested interest. They strive to improve the world in whatever ways they can and contribute to a more rational, civilized society. At the same time, they recognize the complexities often inherent in doing so. They avoid thinking simplistically about complicated issues and strive to appropriately consider the rights and needs of relevant others. They recognize the complexities in developing as thinkers, and commit themselves to life-long practice toward self-improvement. They embody the Socratic principle: *The unexamined life is not worth living* , because they realize that many unexamined lives together result in an uncritical, unjust, dangerous world. ~ Linda Elder, September, 2007

Why Critical Thinking?

The Problem

Everyone thinks; it is our nature to do so. But much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought. Shoddy thinking is costly, both in money and in quality of life. Excellence in thought, however, must be systematically cultivated.

A Definition

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and
imposing intellectual standards upon them.

The Result

A well cultivated critical thinker:

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely;
- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards;
- thinks openmindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems.

Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism.

(Taken from Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools,* Foundation for Critical Thinking Press, 2008)

Critical Thinking Defined by Edward Glaser

In a seminal study on critical thinking and education in 1941, Edward Glaser defines critical thinking as follows “The ability to think critically, as conceived in this volume, involves three things: (1) an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences, (2) knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning, and (3) some skill in applying those methods. Critical thinking calls for a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends. It also generally requires ability to recognize problems, to find workable means for meeting those problems, to gather and marshal pertinent information, to recognize unstated assumptions and values, to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity, and discrimination, to interpret data, to appraise evidence and evaluate arguments, to recognize the existence (or non-existence) of logical relationships between propositions, to draw warranted conclusions and generalizations, to put to test the conclusions and generalizations at which one arrives, to reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience, and to render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life.

(Edward M. Glaser, *An Experiment in the Development of Critical Thinking*, Teacher’s College, Columbia University, 1941)

Teaching Group Work: Building Student Collaboration and Agency

At University Park Campus School, students learn through group work that they have something to contribute.

MAY 10, 2016

Overview

At University Park Campus School (UPCS), group work is an integral part of the culture. The school practices group work across all grades and subjects, and students see collaborative problem-solving modeled by their teachers and administration. Through group work, they learn that there's a diversity of valid perspectives, build comfort around using their own voices, and understand the value of accepting and building on the contributions of others.

"The world increasingly relies on people being able to work together to collaboratively solve problems," says Dan St. Louis, University Park Campus School's principal. “The problems of today’s society are difficult. No one person is able to solve an issue on their own. You need to be able to work with others to appreciate what they’re saying, push back if need be, but also to be reflective about your own understanding and to be able to build approaches with other people. For us, we’re training kids to do that now."

How It's Done

The seventh-grade curriculum at University Park includes a strong focus on building foundational group-work skills. A lot of students are self-conscious when they come to UPCS, observes math teacher Kathy Murphy. "They don't want others to know if they're having trouble with solving a problem, and they're shy about speaking," says Murphy.

UPCS’ middle school grades introduce students to the roles and expectations of group work and build their comfort around participating. By high school, the teachers can step back to let students direct their own group work.

Here's how UPCS educators teach group work:

Step 1: Help Students Experience Group Work Through Warm-Up Activities

Warm-up activities can increase your students’ awareness about what makes good and bad group work.

"Students think that they do good group work, but then you see students who aren't talking to each other," says Murphy. “They're like, 'Here, let me read that,' and they do it on their own. That's not group work.”

In Murphy's seventh-grade class, her students do the following warm-up activities to help them better understand what doing good group work feels like:

1. Without talking, have your students line up by height. "All students understand what height is. It's definitely accessible to all," explains Murphy. Time your students to see how quickly they can do this activity.
2. Without talking, have your students line up by birthday. Time them.
3. Have your students line by the number of their street address. This time, your students can say only their street number.
4. Reflect with your students. Murphy asks her students, “What do you notice?” They realize that when they talk and listen to each other, group work is easier, and they are able to achieve their goal more quickly.

Step 2: Share How People Learn in Different Ways

Share a personal example of how you have learned from a student to show that everybody has a unique perspective, something to contribute, and that there are many ways to come up with one solution.

Murphy shares a story with her class about assigning a problem to a previous class. "I myself, being a college graduate and a math major, had this big, elaborate way to solve it. But a ten-year-old did the same exact problem, and I couldn't believe how fabulous his answer was. We got the same answer, and we got to the solution differently. He drew a picture, and it was fabulous."

Step 3: Build Comfort Around Speaking in a Group

At the beginning of the year, assign problems that every student can access and feel comfortable about contributing his or her ideas. By incorporating low-stakes writing or verbal prompts (such as, “What do you notice?”), you encourage kids to feel safe in participating. "Even if they don't know the answer, they can say, 'Well, I noticed there's a pattern that is increasing by two,'" says Murphy.

Step 4: Give Students Roles

In middle school, teachers at University Park lay out more defined roles for their students. Having these specific roles helps students feel more comfortable with participating and prompts them with ways to participate. By the upper grades of high school, students no longer need roles defined for them and are able to jump into group work without guidance.

Roles vary depending on the subject and assignment. "In a literature circle, one person may have the researcher role, one person the facilitator role, and one person the wordsmith role," suggests Principal St. Louis.

In Murphy's seventh-grade math class, she has her students take on the group roles of a questioner, summarizer, and clarifier.

To help her students follow through with their roles, Murphy gives them a sheet of paper with their role description and verbal prompts. This builds comfort in speaking up because they're following directions, instead of having to know what to say or how to contribute on their own.

Here's a sample of what their role directions and prompts look like:

Your Job as Questioner:
Read the problem to the group. After the summarizer takes a turn:

- Determine what questions to ask about what you read.
- Explain what you were thinking while the problem was read aloud.
- Describe a possible strategy and ask your group if it will work.

You can start your conversation with:

- I wonder what it means when the problem said _______?
- How can we _______?
- Could we use _______ to start to solve this problem? (_______ could be a table, chart, picture, equation.)

In solving the problem:

- Check all math calculations for accuracy.
- Make sure each group member participates in completing the work.
- Ask questions about each step of your work to make sure everyone understands how to solve the problem.

"It's like a baby learning to walk," offers Murphy. “They need a little stroller to hold onto or a ledge to brace themselves. And until they can do that, you can't take that away. It's easing them into being able to do great group work on their own.”

Download UPCS’ directions and group work prompts for the roles of questioner, summarizer, clarifier, designer/artist, reader/checker, and writer/questioner (PDF).

Step 5: Create a Strong Group-Work Problem

Created by UPCS, here are the characteristics of a good group-work problem:

- It involves a goal that would be difficult to accomplish alone.
- The roles that students take on to solve the problem are interdependent.
- There are multiple interpretations on solving the problem.
- It includes an element of discovery and curiosity.
- It connects to a piece of literature.
- It needs to be rigorous. The expectations for a group problem are set higher than a problem that a student would solve alone, and the end product must be something more rigorous than drawing a picture and making a poster.
- Students should explore and synthesize unfamiliar sources (for example, as if preparing for a debate).
- Students should understand the content deeply enough that they're able to teach it.

"One of my favorite group-work activities when I taught Orwell's 1984 was a **jigsaw** where, for example, five groups of five students might each read a different news article about the modern world," recalls St. Louis. "Then, each student would join a new group of five where they need to explain their previous group's article to each other and make connections to each. Using these connections, the group must then construct a definition of the word 'Orwellian.' I certainly could have simply told passive students the definition of this term and what it means, but by enabling them to actively construct their own knowledge, they internalize the ideas more deeply -- as well as internalize their ability to have voice and agency in an academic setting."

Step 6: Group Students by Their Complementary Strengths

If a group problem requires different skills, choose students with those skills so that they can solve the problem together and rely on each other for their different strengths. "Sometimes I'll group students together because I know that this particular kid is good at drawing one thing out of another, or that one of them might have strong spatial skills, and another might have strong symbolic skills, and if we could have them working together, they can try to bridge that," explains Shannon Hammond, a University Park ninth, eleventh, and twelfth-grade teacher. "If I know a kid is particularly going to struggle with some construction aspect, they're going to be balanced with somebody that isn't as challenged by the construction aspect."

Help parents and students understand that every student has something to contribute.

Sometimes parents will tell you that they want their student to be challenged and question how group work can do that. Sometimes you'll get students with a strong understanding of the content who want to work on their own without classmates slowing them down.

When students or parents share these concerns with Murphy, she tells them about the three levels of understanding and explanation:

1. You know enough to convince yourself.
2. You know enough to convince a friend who loves you.

3. You know enough to convince a skeptic.

"That's what I talk to the high fliers about," says Murphy. “They're solid in their understanding and can do the work, but how well can they explain it to others? Explaining what you know to others raises your level of understanding, and a lot of kids struggle with that."

Murphy often has students who at first don't see the value in working with others. They may be good at putting what they know into an equation, but when she asks them to show their understanding in another way -- with blocks, for example -- they have a hard time with it. When this happens, often the students whose ability they doubted are able to help them. "Even the kid who thinks they are the top student can learn something from the other students,” states Murphy, “and they learn that we all have different strengths and different things that we can contribute."

Step 7: Assess Group Work

A big part of assessing group work is watching the group in action and seeing how they work together, says Murphy. When her students work in groups, she has every student write in his or her own notebook. Knowing what her students should be able to accomplish by the end of class, such as completing three math problems, she can look at their notebooks and see how far they have gotten. If they’ve only completed one problem, she knows that she should check their understanding or how they're working with other students.

Here are some of Murphy’s formative assessments to check student understanding:

- **Quick quizzes:** She gives each student one to two problems (similar to problems that they've solved within their group) to check their individual understanding.
- **Exit tickets:** A group work rubric (PDF) is an exit ticket for students to grade themselves on how they worked in their group and how their group worked as a whole. Her students are honest with their reflections, and if they rate themselves a one or a two, she asks, "How can we improve that?"
- **Daily check-ins:** Five to seven minutes before class ends, Murphy's eighth-grade students reflect on how they each did that day (What was good about today? Any ah-ha moments?). "Even though I'm hopefully meeting every group multiple times during the class, individually, each student can say how they think the day went, " says Murphy. “They'll say if they are confused about something. They'll say if they thought it worked great.”

"Student voice is really important to us," declares St. Louis, and the student voice and agency that University Park fosters in their students flows outside of the classroom. "I have kids come to me as a group every single day. I had four seventh-grade students come to me the other day. They want to do a bake sale to raise money for the Lymphoma Society." His students set up a fundraiser competition between seventh and eighth grade. St. Louis concludes, "They see the value in teamwork."

Differentiation Basics

June Preszler
TIE Education Specialist

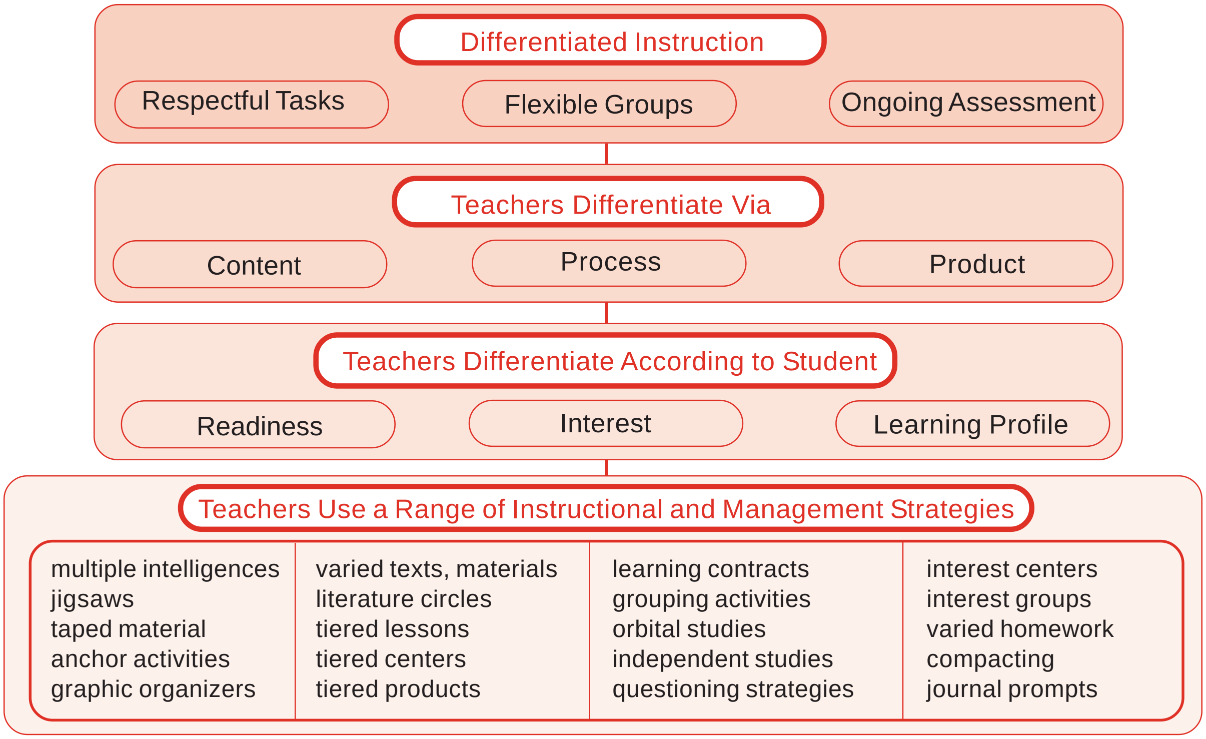
Before you begin, there are a few (well, maybe more than a few) basic elements to differentiation that will make the journey smoother for you and your students.

Remember, you are probably using various aspects of differentiation right now in your classrooms. But are you being explicit about the ways in which you differentiate? In others words:

- Are you conscious of the efforts you make to meet the needs of all your students?
- Do you keep track of the ways you address individual learning styles and preferences?
- Do you arrange classrooms and structure lessons to increase student motivation?
- Whenever possible, do you provide students with options and choices regarding how they are going to learn and how they are going to show their learning?
- Do you vary the ways in which you assess student learning?
- Do you use cooperative learning and grouping strategies to increase student participation?

Odds are that you already incorporate some or most of these aspects of differentiation in your classrooms. As you venture into the world of differentiated instruction, look at what you are already doing. Then consider the principles and strategies provided in this booklet. Select and use those that complement the efforts you already make to meet the diverse needs of your students. Keep in mind that differentiation shouldn't be something that complicates your day or life. Although additional work and effort are required up front, the payoff comes later in the lesson of study or even in the school year. The payoff comes when students achieve more in your classrooms, become more involved in classroom discussions, smile more during their school days, and, yes, even score higher on various assessments.

In *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, Carol Ann Tomlinson offers the following framework for helping teachers differentiate in the classroom (15).



Differentiated Instruction

Respectful Tasks
Flexible Groups
Ongoing Assessment

Teachers Differentiate Via

Content
Process
Product

Teachers Differentiate According to Student

Readiness
Interest
Learning Profile

Teachers Use a Range of Instructional and Management Strategies

multiple intelligences
jigsaws
taped material
anchor activities
graphic organizers

varied texts, materials
literature circles
tiered lessons
tiered centers
tiered products

learning contracts
grouping activities
orbital studies
independent studies
questioning strategies

interest centers
interest groups
varied homework
compacting
journal prompts

Source:

Tomlinson, Carol Ann. *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1999.

Differentiating Instruction with Technology

Marcia Torgrude
TIE Education Specialist

Today's world is different from the one in which we lived just ten years ago. To be truly prepared for the 21st century, our students need schools that reflect those differences. Today's students are digital and visual learners who thrive on collaboration through the use of computers, video equipment, audio equipment, digital cameras, and telephones.

If we think about differentiating the classroom content, product, process, and learning environment with the digital learner in mind, the students will become more actively involved in their learning. Multimedia applications combine video, sound, text, animation, and graphics which address the various learning styles of our students. Frank and Catherine Townsend identify six benefits of using multimedia based lessons to meet learning needs:

1. Multimedia reaches a variety of senses. This allows the individual to tailor or focus their learning to the individual style, whether it is verbal, auditory, or physical.
2. Multimedia projects validate self expression by allowing students to decide how they want to create a project or assimilate information.
3. Technology gives a sense of ownership to the user. The students actually create evidence of what they have learned, which can later become part of a portfolio.
4. Multimedia creates an active rather than passive atmosphere for learning, which requires student participation and makes students think.
5. Technology fosters communication among students as well as between student and teacher. They discuss the content, organization of content, and how to present it to others (topics which may not have otherwise been discussed).
6. The use of technology and multimedia makes sense because it is already built into the everyday life of all students. (Townsend, 1992)

The tables on the following pages reflect the use of multimedia to promote differentiation in the classroom. The three focus areas are the interactivity on the web, handheld technologies, and software. Each provides great resources to support choices in the classroom.

The web provides every aspect of interactivity for each learning style. Graphics, images, and video support the visual learner, while interactive tools support the kinesthetic learner. The auditory learner benefits from video and audio and the textual learner finds outlets for reading and writing that are more motivating than the paper/pencil format of the past.

Handhelds provide an array of uses. Students can use them for organization, writing, document reading, document sharing, data collection, visualizations, concept maps, calculating, assessing, and concept mapping. These devices are effective in active learning situations, where students ask questions, gather information, analyze information and share results. Most importantly, handhelds facilitate a collaborative learning environment. Students can share a document by beaming to each other, or they can upload or download documents to or from the web. Putting a palm-sized computer in the student's hand will enable educators to unleash learning opportunities afforded by this small, but revolutionary technology.

Software – A variety of software programs support differentiation. There is a cost for these programs, but they are well worth the expense as they open new avenues to our multi-modal digital learners.

How to Strike a Balance Between Accuracy and Fluency

User Rating: ●●●●● / 17

Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ● Best Rate

Details

Parent Category: Articles
Category: Four Skills
Written by Chris Cotter

HOW TO
STRIKE A BALANCE
BETWEEN
ACCURACY AND FLUENCY
HEADS UP ENGLISH

It's important to balance accuracy and fluency among the various stages and activities in a lesson. Both refer to the productive skills of the students. Where one focuses on getting the language right, the other focuses on getting the language out smoothly and quickly.

What is Accuracy?

Accuracy refers to the mechanics of the language. Students address and improve on the following ideas:

1. Clear and articulate speaking or writing.
2. Language free from grammar mistakes.
3. Words spelled and/or pronounced correctly.
4. Language appropriate to the situation and/or context.

When a teacher, classroom, or student fails to consider accuracy in the class, then students may sound less fluent and capable with the language. This can quickly cause problems when students need to use the language for more than casual conversation.

For example, let's say a businessperson uses English for email, as well as regularly attends teleconferences with the head office. Because English ability is so visible, it oftentimes easily gets confused with overall job ability or competence. The businessperson thus sounds less capable in the world of business, especially with peers and colleagues he doesn't regularly and directly work. It really isn't much different than a colleague who dresses in shorts and stained t-shirts. In most business industries, peers simply don't take him seriously or believe him to be fully competent.

There are unsympathetic listeners to consider too. Most native English speakers in the real world outside of the classroom don't have the background or the patience to work through the mistakes of a non-native English speaker. Whether the mistakes come from the native tongue of the students, are pronunciation problems, grammar problems, or even cultural differences, breakdowns in communication occur. What had been intelligible in the classroom for the teacher and other students is suddenly no longer intelligible outside the classroom.

It must be noted here: Too much attention to accuracy results in students unable to use the language. They breakdown the sentences, translate them, and look at the sentences from different angles to minimize mistakes. This results in very slow response times. The language becomes less able to carry out its purpose, namely to effectively communicate ideas and information.

What is Fluency?

Fluency focuses on the flow of language. Sentences must be spoken smoothly and with few pauses. In addition, students respond to questions and information quickly. Lastly, it's important that students participate in a conversation, not simply react to it.

...accuracy refers to the mechanics of the language

CLICK TO TWEET

There are a number of factors which affect fluency. To start, unfamiliar material results in less smooth, less quick language production. This is especially evident when the teacher first presents the target language (grammar, vocabulary, phrases, etc.). Students of all levels, when faced with new material, must process and practice it. A certain level of automaticity must be achieved before also gaining a level of fluency.

And what is automaticity? The term refers to the recall time on the target language. Students work towards producing the new structures naturally and with less thought. When students repeatedly practice a word, phrase, or sentence structure, then the new material becomes automatic. Students require less time to think about how to produce the language. Improved automaticity directly affects fluency.

It's important to note that too much information presented and practiced at once hinders fluency. For example, as students must become familiar with new material in the earlier stages of a lesson, they struggle with longer and richer sentences. In short, there's simply too much to juggle all at once.

Of course the whole of the lesson shouldn't be restricted to short sentences that narrowly focus on the target grammar and/or vocabulary. However, restrictive practice at the start improves productive fluency later in the lesson. As the lesson progresses and students become comfortable and familiar with the target language, additional information for longer, richer sentences can be worked into the lesson plan.

Response time also measures fluency. If someone asks a question, and the student takes several seconds before giving any answer, this can be considered poor fluency.

3 Principles for Teaching Reading

by Joe McVeigh

Teaser: How can you help your students improve their reading skills? Joe McVeigh offers three solid principles for teaching reading and gives suggestions on how to implement each with your students.

Reading is a skill that every student needs. As teachers, we work to improve our students' reading skills during the year. Here are three principles to aid you as you try to help your students become better readers.

Develop Reading Lessons in Three Parts

When we think of teaching reading, we often concentrate on the actual act of reading. How long will it take students to read the assignment? How well are they comprehending what they read? This is what goes on *during* the reading process. But informed teachers think beyond the *during* stage to set their students up for success. They put together reading lessons in three parts so as to focus on *pre-*, *during-*, and *postreading activities.*

Prereading Activities

Develop *prereading activities* to prepare your students for the reading process. This sounds like a basic idea but, in fact, this is the step that is most commonly skipped by teachers even though research has shown that it has the most positive effect on comprehension. Before your students begin reading, introduce some *schema-building* activities. *Schema* means the framework or context of knowledge that a person brings to a new idea or experience.

For example, if you have grown up in a cold climate, you probably have a very different understanding of snow and winter than a person who was raised in a warm climate. Take some time at the beginning of the lesson to help students realize what they already know about the reading topic, especially if the subject matter is unfamiliar to students.

Some prereading tasks include:

- *Discussion questions:* You can also raise students' awareness of what they are about to read by posing questions for them to discuss before reading.
- *Vocabulary:* Depending on your views about vocabulary learning, you might want to preteach unfamiliar vocabulary words to students before beginning the reading.
- *Skimming:* Ask students to preview the reading by skimming the text quickly, just reading headlines or the topic sentences of paragraphs. You can discuss with students when this type of previewing is especially useful.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that prereading activities are just for beginning level students. It's an important step for advanced students as well—you just need to adjust the task and the demands to meet their language levels.

During-Reading Activities

While students are reading, you can also ask them to take part in *during-reading activities*. These might include keeping an important question in mind as they read. You can also ask students to re-read the text to find specific details or to underline or take notes as they read. The idea is get students to read actively and to engage with the text. Select a task that will require them to think as they read, not just skim over the words.

Postreading Activities

After students have read the passage, you can engage them in *postreading activities*. Many reading textbooks make use of comprehension questions at this point. Although basic comprehension is important, in the postreading activities you should move students into critical thinking tasks. For example:

- Ask students to analyze a text critically and evaluate it.
- Ask students to consider in which lines of the text the author gives factual information, as opposed to just giving his or her own opinion.
- Call on students to point out any particular signal words that indicate fact or opinion.

If you are teaching reading along with speaking or writing, postreading activities may include reflecting on the reading and integrating it with writing or speaking through essays or brief presentations.

Explicitly Teach Reading Strategies

Reading experts agree that one of the best ways to help students in their reading is to explicitly teach reading strategies (Grabe, 2009). Strategies are “conscious actions that readers take to improve their reading skills” (Anderson, 2008, p. 10). You’re already familiar with many of these. Some strategies to try out:

- Build activities to encourage your students to skim quickly through a text, just to get the gist or to scan the text for specific information.
- Encourage your students to underline or highlight key words, phrases, and ideas.
- Teach them how to take notes or use graphic organizers to sort out their ideas.

All of these strategies help students not only to comprehend the text in front of them, but to become better readers.

Some students may be reluctant to employ strategies because they just want to grasp the meaning of the text and answer the questions that follow. And as teachers, we sometimes rush through the reading strategies on automatic pilot so that we don’t realize the importance of really teaching strategies explicitly. But if you can encourage those students to make use of strategies, they’ll find that they are able to grasp the meaning of a text even more effectively. Beyond that, they will form useful habits that can be used in other school subjects and in work settings.

Strategies can be taught at almost any level of reading, though Anderson (2008) cautions against overwhelming beginning level students with too many at once. Still, almost any level student can learn to make predictions, ask questions, or activate prior knowledge before beginning to read.

Strategies are just as important at higher levels, but here you may be focused on more sophisticated strategies, such as assessing the trustworthiness of a narrator.

Help Students Develop Vocabulary Skills

Vocabulary plays an enormously important role in reading (Nation, 2001) and a lack of vocabulary stands between many readers and the ability to read faster and comprehend more. So, of course, we want our students to learn more vocabulary words. But not all vocabulary words are created equal! Research figures show that the 2,000 most commonly used words account for about 80% of all the words that students will encounter in a text. For academic reading purposes, words found on the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2006) will account for another ten percent. So it makes sense to concentrate vocabulary practice on the most commonly taught words.

We can help students expand their vocabulary by raising their awareness of *word families*. Word families are groups of words that share a common base to which different prefixes and suffixes can be added that either change the part of speech or the meaning. The teacher's job is to help students recognize that the same root word may exist in different forms. For instance, the noun *nature* becomes the adjective *natural* when the suffix *–al* is added. It's helpful for teachers to learn the most commonly used forms. A useful list of these is found in Coxhead's Academic Word List. We can likewise expand our students' knowledge of vocabulary by focusing on *synonyms* and *antonyms.*

Most students are aware that paper or electronic dictionaries are potentially important tools—your job is getting them to use them effectively to help expand their vocabularies! Learning correct pronunciation and spelling, along with the multiple meanings that some words have is an effective way of helping students expand their vocabulary as well as improve their reading.

Conclusion

We all want our students to be better readers and to encourage them to succeed. Use these three principles to guide your reading classes to get the school year off to a good start. Good luck!

References

Anderson, N. J. (2008). *Practical English language teaching: Reading*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Coxhead, A. (2006). *Essentials of teaching academic vocabulary*. Boston: Thomson Heinle.

Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Joe McVeigh is based in Middlebury, Vermont, USA, where he works as an independent consultant for language programs and as a workshop and conference speaker. He is co-author of two books in the Q: Skills for Success series from Oxford University Press and of *Tips for Teaching Culture: Practical Approaches to Intercultural Communication* from Pearson.

The Internet TESLJournal

ESL Listening Comprehension: Practical Guidelines for Teachers

Justine Ross
Kyoto Sangyo University (Kyoto, Japan)
saritojustine [at] hotmail.com

Introduction

Being able to listen well is an important part of communication for everyone. For our students, guided practice by a teacher is one of the best ways to improve this skill. A student with good listening comprehension skills will be able to participate more effectively in communicative situations. What follows is an exploration of areas that language teachers may find useful in their classroom and when preparing listening materials.

Teaching the skill of listening cannot be emphasized enough in a communicative classroom. For second language learners, developing the skill of listening comprehension is extremely important. Students with good listening comprehension skills are better able to participate effectively in class (Brown, 2001).

The Purpose Should Be Made Clear to the Students

When the learning objective of a language class is explained to students, they can better focus on specific vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, listening for different purposes, and so on. This clear explanation by the teacher of a lesson's pedagogic goals will help learners to further develop specific objectives in a shorter amount of time. For instance, by informing students that the lesson will be about giving directions, they can consciously focus on remembering the vocabulary used in that activity.

Progression of Listening Comprehension Activities

This progression of activities allows the learner to use what they know, to go from being a passive learner, to an active learner.

1. warm-up activity
2. listening comprehension activity
3. controlled practice
4. open-ended listening/speaking activity

Example Lesson

If the objective of your class is to understand speech at different rates of delivery and the topic is daily life, here are some ideas for the suggested progression of learning activities.

1. **Warm-up Activity**: Ask students, "What do you do every day?"
2. **Listening Comprehension Activity**: The teacher could follow with a listening comprehension activity, such as two people having a conversation about their daily life. Students must answer true or false questions based on the previous listening activity.
3. **Controlled Practice**: Following this, an example of a controlled practice activity could be a drill activity that models the same structure or vocabulary.
4. **Open-ended Listening/Speaking Activity**: After this, an open-ended activity could follow that allows students to have the freedom to practice listening comprehension and speaking, such as interviewing other members in the class about their daily life and asking for further information. This is an example of activities that build on each other and share the same objective. Communication and listening comprehension should begin with what students already know so that they can build on their existing knowledge and skills with activities designed on the same principle.

Design and Layout Considerations

A handout that is filled with too many activities may contribute to the learner feeling overwhelmed and unable to focus on the particular purpose of a listening activity. In addition, a worksheet that does not show examples of the response expected by the question may also lead to the student feeling confused and frustrated. This may also result in an inaccurate indication of the level of a learner’s listening comprehension skills as a consequence of their not being able to understand the worksheet, rather than because of the listening activity itself.

Teaching Methodology Considerations

If a teacher always uses the same teaching methodology, they may become predictable and, perhaps, less interesting for their students. It is important to vary techniques in order to challenge students. A variation on the "fill in the missing word listening activity" could be to use the same listening materials, but to set a pair work activity where student A and student B have the same worksheet where some information items are missing. The students must ask each other for the missing words in a song. That way, the students have to practice effective communication by accurately forming the correct question necessary to find out the missing word from their partner. To confirm that their answer is correct, the students then listen to the song.

Long Listening Activities

Another technique that can be used in a long listening activity is to assign students different comprehension questions. After listening to the activity and taking notes to answer questions, students then swap information to complete the "whole class chart," correlating what each student has heard to arrive at the big picture. If there are any questions that remain unanswered during the first or second hearing, and following the information swap activity, the whole class can listen to the tape again. The students will then try to find the answer to the questions that have not been previously understood, rather than the teacher providing the answers straight away. These techniques involve group work and problem solving. They also instigate further communication and facilitate listening comprehension development.

The Use of Authentic Listening Materials

Linguists like Porter & Porter (1987), Brown (2001), and Mangubhai (2002) recommend the use of authentic text to help students further develop their communicative skills. The use of authentic listening materials is an important factor to take into consideration when designing listening comprehension materials. By using such listening materials, the learner is given the chance to develop the skills needed to comprehend and to use language that is commonly found in real situations.

With the use of authentic listening materials, students learn to comprehend double meanings, predict meaning, make allowances for performance errors committed by other speakers, deal with interruptions, and so on. It is important, therefore, to take the opportunity wherever possible to expose students to examples of real language usage to help them become more communicatively competent.

The use of authentic materials stimulates and motivates learners to comprehend the content of an oral text because the practical benefits of understanding such authentic language material are obvious. Some examples of authentic listening materials are listening to a telephone message for the purpose of understanding a cancelled appointment, or listening to songs to learn more about well-known bands that sing in English. Such material is relevant to the students' life and areas of personal interest. By using authentic listening materials, students are motivated to improve their level of comprehension as they feel that they can achieve a level of proficiency that has meaning and adds value to their life when speaking English as a second language.

Conclusion

It is important to maintain an interactive and communicative approach for teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language. However, it is also important to vary the students' learning focus by concentrating on the skills needed to become proficient in a second language. Listening comprehension is such a required skill.

When designing lessons and teaching materials to further develop listening comprehension skills, students need to be motivated and stay motivated. This is best accomplished by determining the suitability of the listening materials, the techniques used in classroom teaching, and the use of authentic materials.

References

- Brown, D. (2001). Teaching by principle–an interactive approach to language pedagogy. Addison Wesley Longman: New York.

- Mangubhai, F. (2002). Methodology in teaching a second language–study book. University of Southern Queensland: Toowoomba.
- Porter, D. & Roberts, J. (1987). Authentic listening activities In Long, H. &
- Richards, J. (Eds.) Methodology in TESOL–A book of readings. Newbury House: New York. (pp.177-190)

Teaching Speaking: Activities to Promote Speaking in a Second Language

Hayriye Kayi
http://unr.edu/homepage/hayriyek
kayih[at]unr.nevada.edu
University of Nevada (Nevada,USA)

Introduction

Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. In order to teach second language learners how to speak in the best way possible, some speaking activities are provided below, that can be applied to ESL and EFL classroom settings, together with suggestions for teachers who teach oral language.

What Is "Teaching Speaking"?

What is meant by "teaching speaking" is to teach ESL learners to:

- Produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns
- Use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language.
- Select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter.
- Organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence.
- Use language as a means of expressing values and judgments.
- Use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency. (Nunan, 2003)

How To Teach Speaking

Now many linguistics and ESL teachers agree on that students learn to speak in the second language by "interacting". Communicative language teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this aim. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in ESL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. In brief, ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task.

Activities To Promote Speaking

Discussions

After a content-based lesson, a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide controversial sentences like “people learn best when they read vs. people learn best when they travel”. Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is essential that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defended the idea in the best way. This activity fosters critical thinking and quick decision making, and students learn how to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. For efficient group discussions, it is always better not to form large groups, because quiet students may avoid contributing in large groups. The group members can be either assigned by the teacher or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas. Lastly, in class or group discussions, whatever the aim is, the students should always be encouraged to ask questions, paraphrase ideas, express support, check for clarification, and so on.

Role Play

One other way of getting students to speak is role-playing. Students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that "You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and…" (Harmer, 1984)

Simulations

Simulations are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as Harmer (1984) suggests, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

Information Gap

In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. These activities are effective because everybody has the opportunity to talk extensively in the target language.

Brainstorming

On a given topic, students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas.

Storytelling

Students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have. Students also can tell riddles or jokes. For instance, at the very beginning of each class session, the teacher may call a few students to tell short riddles or jokes as an opening. In this way, not only will the teacher address students' speaking ability, but also get the attention of the class.

Interviews

Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them becoming socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and "introduce" his or her partner to the class.

Story Completion

This is a very enjoyable, whole-class, free-speaking activity for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on.

Reporting

Before coming to class, students are asked to read a newspaper or magazine and, in class, they report to their friends what they find as the most interesting news. Students can also talk about whether they have experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.

Playing Cards

In this game, students should form groups of four. Each suit will represent a topic. For instance:

- **Diamonds**: Earning money
- **Hearts**: Love and relationships
- **Spades:** An unforgettable memory
- **Clubs:** Best teacher

Each student in a group will choose a card. Then, each student will write 4-5 questions about that topic to ask the other people in the group. For example:

If the topic "Diamonds: Earning Money" is selected, here are some possible questions:

- Is money important in your life? Why?
- What is the easiest way of earning money?
- What do you think about lottery? Etc.

However, the teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare yes-no questions, because by saying yes or no students get little practice in spoken language production. Rather, students ask open-ended questions to each other so that they reply in complete sentences.

Picture Narrating

This activity is based on several sequential pictures. Students are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures by paying attention to the criteria provided by the teacher as a rubric. Rubrics can include the vocabulary or structures they need to use while narrating.

Picture Describing

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. For this activity students can form groups and each group is given a different picture. Students discuss the picture with their groups, then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fosters the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their public speaking skills.

Find the Difference

For this activity students can work in pairs and each couple is given two different pictures, for example, picture of boys playing football and another picture of girls playing tennis. Students in pairs discuss the similarities and/or differences in the pictures.

Suggestions For Teachers in Teaching Speaking

Here are some suggestions for English language teachers while teaching oral language:

- Provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language by providing a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge.
- Try to involve each student in every speaking activity; for this aim, practice different ways of student participation.
- Reduce teacher speaking time in class while increasing student speaking time. Step back and observe students.
- Indicate positive signs when commenting on a student's response.
- Ask eliciting questions such as "What do you mean? How did you reach that conclusion?" in order to prompt students to speak more.
- Provide written feedback like "Your presentation was really great. It was a good job. I really appreciated your efforts in preparing the materials and efficient use of your voice…"
- Do not correct students' pronunciation mistakes very often while they are speaking. Correction should not distract student from his or her speech.
- Involve speaking activities not only in class but also out of class; contact parents and other people who can help.
- Circulate around classroom to ensure that students are on the right track and see whether they need your help while they work in groups or pairs.
- Provide the vocabulary beforehand that students need in speaking activities.
- Diagnose problems faced by students who have difficulty in expressing themselves in the target language and provide more opportunities to practice the spoken language.

Conclusion

Teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

References

- Celce-Murcia. M. 2001. Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language (3rd ed). USA: Heinle&Heinle.
- Chaney, A.L., and T.L. Burk. 1998. Teaching Oral Communication in Grades K-8. Boston: Allyn&Bacon.
- Baruah, T.C. 1991. The English Teacher's Handbook. Delhi: Sterling Publishing House.
- Brown, G. and G. Yule. 1983. Teaching the Spoken Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. 1984. The Practice of English Language Teaching. London: Longman.
- McDonough, J. and C. Shaw. 2003. Materials and Methods in ELT: a teacher's guide. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nunan, D., 2003. Practical English Language Teaching. NY:McGraw-Hill.
- Staab, C. 1992. Oral language for today's classroom. Markham, ON: Pippin Publishing.

Shifting the Balance Toward Authentic Communication in Our Classrooms

Students working together to puzzle out lantern riddles, a target language activity.

By Heidi Steele

As a high school Chinese language teacher, I am forever making three mistakes:

1. I view language learning as a roughly linear process.
2. I design classroom activities with the goal of practicing particular vocabulary items and grammatical structures. Or, if I remember to keep the focus on communicating meaning, I design scenarios that merely mimic real life.
3. I place greater value on planned activities than on all of the other communication that occurs in the classroom.

All of these mistakes reduce the amount of authentic communication that occurs in my classroom. We know that to facilitate our students acquiring, in addition to learning, Chinese, we need to give them opportunities to use Chinese for genuine communication. In other words, their minds need to be focused on communication, rather than on practicing the language. When this happens, the language drops into the background, and students almost forget that they are speaking Chinese, rather than English.

With regard to the first mistake, learning a language is not in fact linear at all. All languages are vast, deep, complex, and inherently messy. A student can venture into new areas of a language from many directions, and they can travel an infinite number of routes as they acquire new vocabulary and syntax. There is no “right” order or context for learning particular language items – students can just as easily learn the word 喜欢 (xǐ huān, to like or enjoy) while talking about family members as they can when discussing colors, politicians, or music.

The second mistake follows from the first. When I see language as linear, I tend to design activities to introduce, practice, and assess proficiency with the vocabulary and syntax that comes next in my curriculum. If I am not careful, I have students practice rather than use the language, which encourages them to view Chinese as “just a class” rather than as an opportunity to develop a new vehicle for communicating about real things with real people. Furthermore, even when I remember to keep the focus on meaningful communication, my planned activities often go no further than mimicking the real world within the classroom walls (“pretend you are talking to a new Chinese friend and introduce your school schedule…” “bargain with your classmate to ‘buy’ something in his/her backpack” and so on). Regardless of the activity, “pretend” communication is still a step removed from actual communication.

The final mistake is a natural outcome of the second. If learning Chinese happens when students are practicing vocabulary and sentence structures or mimicking real life, then the time students spend engaged in activities designed for these purposes seems to be the most valuable in each class period. I have come to realize that in many cases the opposite is true.

In my classroom, we speak Chinese exclusively Monday through Thursday. On Fridays we speak English on an “as needed” basis. Creating a target-language environment, however, is only the first step in encouraging students to acquire the language through meaningful communication. To assess whether I really promote language acquisition, I ranked the activity in my classroom by levels of authenticity. At the bottom I put activities where students deliberately practice new language without meaningful context. At the top are the times when students are so engaged in authentic communication that they forget they are speaking in Chinese. Three activities emerged as winners:

1. Communication with peers at our partner school and with other native speakers where the focus is on sharing knowledge and experience, not on practicing the language.
2. Engagement with authentic materials that involves exploring and learning actual content.
3. Everyday banter, discussions, story telling, and humor that happen around the edges of planned activities. I call this category “Everything Else.”

All of these activities meet the “real-ness test”: The students simply treat Chinese as a means of communication (the road they are traveling, not the destination), learning vocabulary and syntax as needed to understand or communicate their thoughts and ideas.

As an example of the first activity, we share a blog with our partner school in. Using their non-native languages, students post questions they are really curious about. Students from the partner school answer questions in in their native language. We designed the blog this way because it is easier to ask questions in your non-native language, and the answers provide rich examples of authentic language that students will be highly motivated to understand.

The real communication extends beyond helping students to articulate their questions and explaining the meanings of new words and syntax in the answers. We talk extensively about particularly funny, interesting, or surprising replies, and discuss the cultural differences and similarities that emerge as the American and Chinese students dialogue with one another.

The key element of the second activity is the content of the authentic materials. The materials must offer an opportunity to learn something new. Students learn the language needed to understand and think about the actual content. For example, when Maggie Chen (Granada Hills Charter School in Los Angeles) shows her students a public service announcement from Taiwan about conserving resources, the focus is on learning about Taiwan’s environmental initiatives.

The last activity is only possible if you and your students both speak in the target language almost all of the time. The Everything Else may be as simple as talking about how the schedules changes that day because of an assembly, or joking about something funny that happened in class. At a more complex level, it may involve speaking in Chinese over a period of weeks to prepare for a performance. (Too often, we use performances to showcase our Chinese programs, but the planning and rehearsals happen in English. When only the veneer is Chinese, students miss a huge opportunity to use Chinese for real work. The real value in a performance is not the show, but the work that leads up to it.)

All of the Everything Else communication is in fact real. When my students talk with me about setting deadlines, they are using Chinese as a tool for expressing real thoughts, ideas, and concerns. The language itself is relatively transparent.

As I develop the practice of reflecting on the “real-ness” of what occurs in my classroom, my lesson plans shift to increase the amount of real communication that occurs. For example, in the unit on renting apartments, I used to ask students to read Chinese apartment rental ads (a step away from real because none of my students are planning to rent an apartment in China anytime soon), carry out unscripted role-plays between tenants and landlords, and so on. This year I will ask our partner school to find students willing to share descriptions of their family homes with my students, and will ask my students to do the same.

There are no absolutes in language teaching. Placing emphasis on target-language teaching and meaningful communication does not mean we need to banish English, simple vocabulary drills, or “make believe” role-plays from our classrooms – teaching language is all about balance and moderation. We will continue to learn about how our brains process language, and we will continue to share our best practices with one another. As we do, we will assuredly develop more powerful strategies for helping our students to acquire Chinese and to internalize it as an integral part of who they are.

Guided Writing

By Linda Hoyt

What is Guided Writing?

I used to think that guided writing occurred when I gave students a writing assignment and directed them to use a particular format, genre or topic. When I asked them to write in a learning log about a science experiment , write a reflection on a treasured story, or develop an innovation on a favorite predictable book, I was providing guidance but I was mostly giving assignments.

I realize now that these "assignments" had value for deepening knowledge of content and text structure but there was little "guiding" about the craft of being a writer.

I now see guided writing as a highly focused small group writing experience. As in guided reading, this is a time when the teacher is focused tightly on a small group of learners. During this small group time, the teacher can provide link ups to minilessons shared with the whole class and give an opportunity for the writers to engage with the minilesson concepts while the teacher is close by to guide and support. This small group time might be an opportunity to stretch and expand the writing skills of gifted students, to reteach key writing skills for struggling students, or to demonstrate an informational text feature a group of students would find helpful in their content writing. As in guided reading, this time is built upon learner needs. Groups are small, flexible and short term.

Parallels To Guided Reading

I see many parallels between guided reading and guided writing. Both are conducted in a small group setting and emphasize strategies. Both emphasize explicit teaching followed by students independently applying and reflecting upon the strategies which were taught.

I really appreciate the role guided writing plays in a balanced literacy curriculum as it is flexible, fits into any management system and supports all curricular areas.

Guided Writing as an Extension of Guided Reading

I often slip into guided writing as an extension of a guided reading lesson, taking students into the world of the writer in response to their reading. In this case, I would ask the students to revisit their guided reading selection to think with the eyes of an informational author. What do we notice about this author's word choice, use of bullets in a list, use of captions, or conventions such as bold face headings. How did these help us as readers? How might we use those tools in our own informational writing?

The next step would be to get out writing folders and have the students examine a piece of informational text to consider adding text features which would strengthen their message and offer better support to their readers.

In this scenario, guided writing would be slipped into the time allocated for guided reading with students shifting between guided reading and guided writing. This requires no adjustments in daily schedules as guided writing occurs during an already scheduled time block.

Guided Writing Within Writers Workshop

Guided writing can offer instructional power during writers workshop. If you look at your writers workshop schedule, you might be able to allocate ten minutes of each workshop for a guided reading group to meet. This could be regularly scheduled where students know they have guided writing with you every Monday or … It could also be much more flexible in that you could use that allocated guided writing time to gather students in flexible needs groups to do some explicit linking up to a whole class minilesson or to teach an advanced lesson on voice in informational text.

Guided Writing in Content Area Studies

Math, science, social studies and health all offer rich opportunities to gather small guided writing groups for explicit instruction and support on writing in the content areas. Even a brief session can heighten learner awareness and bring increased skill to their written communications.

Sample Guided Writing Lessons

Vignette I: Guided Writing during Writers Workshop

John, Alecia, Alvarito, Shandrea, and Alad lead in closely as I show them the leads in four of my favorite informational picture books. As the students observe, I point out the way the authors have tried to pull me into their texts with first person language such as: Please notice that… Did you know that…or opening with a question.

I had presented several whole class minilessons on strategies for pulling the reader into your informational writing, but these five students continued to develop pieces which read like lists of facts. It was clear to me that they would benefit from the increased intensity of a guided writing group on this topic.

As I continued to point out strategies used in these books, I noticed that Alad kept leaning in closer and that Shandrea was totally focused on the language I was sharing. These are students who are easily distracted and often sit at the back of the sharing circle, yet in the small guided writing group, they were totally connected.

My next step in the Guided Writing lesson was to show the students a piece of my own informational writing which I had placed on a sheet of chart paper. I read it and did a think aloud about how to improve the lead and make it more appealing to a reader. While thinking aloud, I explored the use of questions to open paragraphs and showed the writers how I could change my piece by beginning with a question. Ultimately, they assisted me in drafting my new, far more inviting draft and were eager to dive into their writing folders to add some life to their work.

The group lasted about ten minutes, but we accomplished a great deal. As they left the table, I made a note to meet with them again the next day to check on their progress and invite them to share their changes with each other. I also made a note to be sure these students had an opportunity to share what they had learned and their ensuing changes during our sharing circle for writing.

Vignette II: Guided Writing as an Extension of Guided Reading

Marcella, Stephanie, Malo, Joey, and Megan have been reading about Westward Migration during guided reading. Their discussions have been rich with connections to the social studies unit we are studying as a class. I decided to shift them from guided reading to guided writing to take advantage of the rich descriptors in the text we have been using for guided reading. The language of this particular text is laden with colorful descriptions, and interesting sentence patterns which much needed in the writing of these students.

I explained that we are revisiting the book they have read, not to look at content, but rather to look at the craft of this writer. I requested that they reread page 4 and be prepared to make observations about the writer's craft, especially the descriptions and the way sentences are structured.

Malo volunteered to share first. From page 4, Lashe read: "They created maps, charted rivers, identified plants and animals, and brought back tales of harsh weather and beautiful land." Malo observed that one of the reasons he had really liked reading this book was that he could imagine the activities. The book was written so that he could make a movie in his head and understand what was happening.

The other students agreed and set about finding additional examples of places in the book where the author had used lists of actions and interesting descriptions to stimulate visualization for the reader. They concluded that the sentences which listed actions, separated by commas, were very powerful.

Our next step was to turn to the writing they had been doing on westward migration. Each student had a different topic under development. Our challenge in guided writing was to apply what we learned from this author to our own work. They started in pairs helping each other to look for spots in their writing where this listing strategy could be used and ultimately settled into working independently.

As I closed the guided writing session, I asked them to summarize what they had learned and how they would use that understanding in their writing.

As in the previous vignette, I made a note to myself to check with them the next day and invite them to present a group minilesson for the rest of the class as this writing strategy was one not yet covered for the class at large.

Vignette III: Guided Writing with Emergent Writers in Writers Workshop

Six eager kindergarten faces shone with excitement as they joined me for guided writing. I had selected these students as a temporary guided writing group because they were still focusing on drawing and were producing very little writing even though I was continuing to do modeled and shared writing every day, as well as invite these students to write about math, science, and so on throughout the day.

I started by modeling how to stretch out a word and say it slowly while writing the beginning and ending sounds. I also reminded them to use alphabet cards which were on the table so they could find the picture clues to match the sounds they could hear. We practiced stretching several words.

Next, I passed out photos I had taken the day before of these students doing cross section drawings of pears and oranges. I asked each of them to place their photograph on a piece of writing paper and create labels for the things they could see in the photograph. It worked! They were each able to label several items from their photograph and drawings using at least beginning and ending sounds. Thanks to guided writing and the boost in confidence it provided, these students now see themselves as writers.

Reflections

Guided writing, like guided reading, must reside within a rich culture of language and informational explorations. The teaching done in guided writing is based upon the broad range of experiences children have in modeled writing, shared writing, interactive writing, and personal writing. The groups are small and flexible. Teaching is targeted to explicit learner needs. The emphasis is on the craft of writing.

Guided Reading and Guided Writing: Core Understandings

	Guided Reading	Guided Writing
Small group instruction	√	√
Teacher leads	√	√
Focus on a specific teaching point	√	√
Match instruction to developmental level	√	√
Model, teach, link up to minilessons	√	√
Students individually interact with print	√	√
Students take responsibility to apply the learning	√	√
Guide reflection on the learning	√	√
Connect to personal use of the strategies	√	√
Teacher assesses	√	√

What is Authentic Assessment?

- Definitions
- What Does Authentic Assessment Look Like?
- How is Authentic Assessment Similar to / Different from Traditional Assessment?
    - Traditional Assessment
    - Authentic Assessment
    - Authentic Assessment Complements Traditional Assessment
    - Defining Attributes of Authentic and Traditional Assessment
    - Teaching to the Test
- Alternative Names for Authentic Assessment

Definitions

A form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills -- Jon Mueller

"...Engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field." -- Grant Wiggins -- (**Wiggins, 1993, p. 229**).

"Performance assessments call upon the examinee to demonstrate specific skills and competencies, that is, to apply the skills and knowledge they have mastered." -- Richard J. Stiggins -- (**Stiggins, 1987, p. 34**).

What does Authentic Assessment look like?

An authentic assessment usually includes a task for students to perform and a rubric by which their performance on the task will be evaluated. Click the following links to see many examples of authentic tasks and rubrics.

- **Examples** from teachers in my Authentic Assessment course

How is Authentic Assessment similar to / different from Traditional Assessment?

The following comparison is somewhat simplistic, but I hope it illuminates the different assumptions of the two approaches to assessment.

Traditional Assessment

By "traditional assessment" (TA) I am referring to the forced-choice measures of multiple-choice tests, fill-in-the-blanks, true-false, matching and the like that have been and remain so common in education. Students typically select an answer or recall information to complete the assessment. These tests may be standardized or teacher-created. They may be administered locally or statewide, or internationally.

Behind traditional and authentic assessments is a belief that the primary mission of schools is to help develop productive citizens. That is the essence of most mission statements I have read. From this common beginning, the two perspectives on assessment diverge. Essentially, TA is grounded in educational philosophy that adopts the following reasoning and practice:

1. A school's mission is to develop productive citizens.
2. To be a productive citizen an individual must possess a certain body of knowledge and skills.
3. Therefore, schools must teach this body of knowledge and skills.
4. To determine if it is successful, the school must then test students to see if they acquired the knowledge and skills.

In the TA model, the curriculum drives assessment. "The" body of knowledge is determined first. That knowledge becomes the curriculum that is delivered. Subsequently, the assessments are developed and administered to determine if acquisition of the curriculum occurred.

Authentic Assessment

In contrast, authentic assessment (AA) springs from the following reasoning and practice:

1. A school's mission is to develop productive citizens.
2. To be a productive citizen, an individual must be capable of performing meaningful tasks in the real world.
3. Therefore, schools must help students become proficient at performing the tasks they will encounter when they graduate.
4. To determine if it is successful, the school must then ask students to perform meaningful tasks that replicate real world challenges to see if students are capable of doing so.

Thus, in AA, assessment drives the curriculum. That is, teachers first determine the tasks that students will perform to demonstrate their mastery, and then a curriculum is developed that will enable students to perform those tasks well, which would include the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills. This has been referred to as *planning backwards* (e.g., **McDonald, 1992**).

If I were a golf instructor and I taught the skills required to perform well, I would not assess my students' performance by giving them a multiple choice test. I would put them out on the golf course and ask them to perform. Although this is obvious with athletic skills, it is also true for academic subjects. We can teach students how to *do* math, *do* history and *do* science, not just *know* them. Then, to assess what our students had learned, we can ask students to perform tasks that "replicate the challenges" faced by those using mathematics, doing history or conducting scientific investigation.

Authentic Assessment Complements Traditional Assessment

But a teacher does not have to choose between AA and TA. It is likely that some mix of the two will best meet your needs. To use a silly example, if I had to choose a chauffeur from between someone who passed the *driving* portion of the driver's license test but failed the *written* portion or someone who failed the driving portion and passed the written portion, I would choose the driver who most directly demonstrated the ability to drive, that is, the one who passed the driving portion of the test. However, I would *prefer* a driver who passed both portions. I would feel more comfortable knowing that my chauffeur had a good knowledge base about driving (which might best be assessed in a traditional manner) and was able to apply that knowledge in a real context (which could be demonstrated through an authentic assessment).

Defining Attributes of Traditional and Authentic Assessment

Another way that AA is commonly distinguished from TA is in terms of its defining attributes. Of course, TA's as well as AA's vary considerably in the forms they take. But, typically, along the continuums of attributes listed below, TA's fall more towards the left end of each continuum and AA's fall more towards the right end.

Traditional -- Authentic

Selecting a Response ----------------------------------- Performing a Task

Contrived --- Real-life

Recall/Recognition ------------------------------ Construction/Application

Teacher-structured ------------------------------------ Student-structured

Indirect Evidence --- Direct Evidence

Let me clarify the attributes by elaborating on each in the context of traditional and authentic assessments:

Selecting a Response to Performing a Task: On traditional assessments, students are typically given several choices (e.g., a,b,c or d; true or false; which of these match with those) and asked to select the right answer. In contrast, authentic assessments ask students to demonstrate understanding by performing a more complex task usually representative of more meaningful application.

Contrived to Real-life: It is not very often in life outside of school that we are asked to select from four alternatives to indicate our proficiency at something. Tests offer these contrived means of assessment to increase the number of times you can be asked to demonstrate proficiency in a short period of time. More commonly in life, as in authentic assessments, we are asked to demonstrate proficiency by doing something.

Recall/Recognition of Knowledge to Construction/Application of Knowledge: Well-designed traditional assessments (i.e., tests and quizzes) can effectively determine whether or not students have acquired a body of knowledge. Thus, as mentioned above, tests can serve as a nice complement to authentic assessments in a teacher's assessment portfolio. Furthermore, we *are* often asked to recall or recognize facts and ideas and propositions in life, so tests are somewhat authentic in that sense. However, the demonstration of recall and recognition on tests is typically much less revealing about what we really know and can do than when we are asked to construct a product or performance out of facts, ideas and propositions. Authentic assessments often ask students to analyze, synthesize and apply what they have learned in a substantial manner, and students create new meaning in the process as well.

Teacher-structured to Student-structured: When completing a traditional assessment, what a student can and will demonstrate has been carefully structured by the person(s) who developed the test. A student's attention will understandably be focused on and limited to what is on the test. In contrast, authentic assessments allow more student choice and construction in determining what is presented as evidence of proficiency. Even when students cannot choose their own topics or formats, there are usually multiple acceptable routes towards constructing a product or performance. Obviously, assessments more carefully controlled by the teachers offer advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, more student-structured tasks have strengths and weaknesses that must be considered when choosing and designing an assessment.

Indirect Evidence to Direct Evidence: Even if a multiple-choice question asks a student to analyze or apply facts to a new situation rather than just recall the facts, and the student selects the correct answer, what do you now know about that student? Did that student get lucky and pick the right answer? What thinking led the student to pick that answer? We really do not know. At best, we can make some inferences about what that student might know and might be able to do with that knowledge. The evidence is very indirect, particularly for claims of meaningful application in complex, real-world situations. Authentic assessments, on the other hand, offer more direct evidence of application and construction of knowledge. As in the golf example above, putting a golf student on the golf course to play provides much more direct evidence of proficiency than giving the student a written test. Can a student effectively critique the arguments someone else has presented (an important skill often required in the real world)? Asking a student to write a critique should provide more direct evidence of that skill than asking the student a series of multiple-choice, analytical questions about a passage, although both assessments may be useful.

Teaching to the Test

These two different approaches to assessment also offer different advice about teaching to the test. Under the TA model, teachers have been discouraged from teaching to the test. That is because a test usually assesses a sample of students' knowledge and understanding and assumes that students' performance on the sample is representative of their knowledge of all the relevant material. If teachers focus primarily on the sample to be tested during instruction, then good performance on that sample does not necessarily reflect knowledge of all the material. So, teachers hide the test so that the sample is not known beforehand, and teachers are admonished not to teach to the test.

With AA, teachers are *encouraged* to teach to the test. Students need to learn how to perform well on meaningful tasks. To aid students in that process, it is helpful to show them models of good (and not so good) performance. Furthermore, the student benefits from seeing the task rubric ahead of time as well. Is this "cheating"? Will students then just be able to mimic the work of others without truly understanding what they are doing? Authentic assessments typically do not lend themselves to mimicry. There is not one correct answer to copy. So, by knowing what good performance looks like, and by knowing what specific characteristics make up good performance, students can better develop the skills and understanding necessary to perform well on these tasks. (For further discussion of teaching to the test, see Bushweller.)

Alternative Names for Authentic Assessment

You can also learn something about what AA is by looking at the other common names for this form of assessment. For example, AA is sometimes referred to as

- **Performance Assessment** (or Performance-based) -- so-called because students are asked to *perform* meaningful tasks. This is the other most common term for this type of assessment. Some educators distinguish performance assessment from AA by defining performance assessment as performance-based as Stiggins has above but with no reference to the *authentic* nature of the task (e.g., Meyer, 1992). For these educators, authentic assessments are performance assessments using real-world or authentic tasks or contexts. Since we should not typically ask students to perform work that is not authentic in nature, I choose to treat these two terms synonymously.
- **Alternative Assessment** -- so-called because AA is an *alternative* to traditional assessments.
- **Direct Assessment** -- so-called because AA provides more *direct* evidence of meaningful application of knowledge and skills. If a student does well on a multiple-choice test we might infer *indirectly* that the student could apply that knowledge in real-world contexts, but we would be more

comfortable making that inference from a direct demonstration of that application such as in the golfing example above.

Home | What is it? | Why do it? | How do you do it? | Standards | Tasks | Rubrics| Examples | Glossary

Copyright 2016, Jon Mueller. Professor of Psychology, North Central College, Naperville, IL. Comments, questions or suggestions about this website should be sent to the author, Jon Mueller, at jfmueller@noctrl.edu.