

ORAL COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ACQUISITION ACTIVITIES

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Abstract:

This article describes how to improve oral communication in classroom through acquisition activities. Here is given stages and important factors of activities and how to use them in teaching young learners. So, our research will focus on these areas with the purpose of finding out the way optimizing the teaching effectiveness of acquisition activities.

Key words: acquisition activities, interaction activities, pair working, teaching strategies, evaluation, dialoguing in achievement

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The core of the Natural Approach classroom is a series of acquisition activities. By activity we mean a broad range of events which have a purpose other than conscious grammar practice. Thus, we refer to activities as opposed to audiolingual drills or cognitive learning exercises. For acquisition to take place, the topics used in each activity must be intrinsically interesting or meaningful so that the students' attention is focused on the content of the utterances instead of the form. It is also through acquisition activities that the instructor will introduce new vocabulary, provide the comprehensible input the students will utilize for acquisition, create opportunities for student oral production, and instill a sense of group belonging and cohesion which will contribute to lower affective filters.

Provide comprehensible input

In the early stages the most important function of the activities is to provide comprehensible input, and indeed in a sense, the main task is to develop listening skills. Output in the target language is necessarily and plays only a minor role in furthering the acquisition process. Oral production plays a more important role. In the first place, we wish to give the students ample opportunity to actualize their acquired competence: it is affectively satisfying to most students when they realize that their ability to express themselves in the target language is increasing. Secondly, as the students are able to generate more and more of the target language, this production serves as comprehensible input for the other students in the class. Indeed, in this section, in many of the activities which we will describe, the student talks a great deal.

It is an open question whether this sort of "interlanguage talk" is helpful or harmful for language acquisition. We know of no empirical studies which have investigated this question directly. However, our experience is that interlanguage does a great deal more good than harm, as long as it is not the only input the

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students are exposed to. It is comprehensible, it is communicative, and in many cases, for many students it contains examples of.

The purpose of the activity

Each activity focuses on a particular topic and/or situation, I.e., what students in the class did last night, how to order food in a restaurant, how to apologize, how to refuse a request, what they ate for breakfast, what they like to watch on television, and so forth. The students will normally be aware of this focus. The activity may also often (but not always) have a specific form or structure which will tend to be used repeatedly in that particular activity. The purpose of the activity, however, is to supply comprehensible input, not to teach a specific structure. Most students, in fact, will probably not realize what the grammatical content of any given activity is. This is probably to their advantage, since conscious concentration on structure and form may prevent focusing on the message and may thus impede acquisition.

One of the major points of is that comprehensible input stimulates natural language acquisition. In order for input to serve as a basis for the acquisition process, we must ensure that there is: (1) a focus on transmission of relevant information and (2) a means of facilitating comprehension. It is quite possible, for example, to provide utterances which have some semantic content, but which do not communicate anything of importance. Suppose an instructor says, Roger is going to the store to buy a loaf of bread. Such a sentence carries meaning, but it may not communicate anything unless we know who Roger is and are concerned about his trip and its purpose. If the instructor merely wishes to use such a sentence as an example of the progressive tense in English, the utterance will be of little value as input for language acquisition.

Transmission of information

To draw students' attention away from the linguistic form of an utterance, we need to go beyond a simple meaning and focus on transmission of relevant information. This requirement implies that what is talked about needs to be truly interesting. Discussing topics that are of interest to the students is not just a frill; it is essential if language acquisition is to take place. No matter how "meaningful" we try to make grammar exercises, by their very nature they will not qualify as optimal input for language acquisition since they are not being used for real communication.

A second way to help ensure optimal input for language acquisition is to provide means for aiding comprehension. As we discussed earlier, care-takers help children's comprehension by limiting the topic to the "here and now." This provides extra-linguistic support and gives children an idea of what adults are talking about, allowing them to understand language that is a little beyond their current level of competence. Similarly, the language instructor can provide second language acquirers, children or adults, with extra-linguistic support. This is one of the reasons for the use of pictures and other realia. Good visuals are more than an interesting adjunct; they are an integral part of the equipment needed to encourage language acquisition, especially at the beginning level.

Instructors who discuss totally unfamiliar topics, people, or places, place a huge burden on the student trying to cope with comprehending messages in a new language. The students also have an active role to play in ensuring comprehensible input: when the listeners do not understand, they need to know how to regulate the input. Every language has ways of asking for clarification, asking speakers to repeat, to slow down, to explain. If such tools of communication are taught early, students will have some means of managing

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their own input. An added advantage of being able to use these aspects of conversational competence is that they help make it possible to converse with speakers of the target language outside the classroom.

It is also important that the difficulty level of the content of the activity be properly adjusted. If students encounter too much new vocabulary and structure in an activity, they tend to spend their time translating instead of participating in conversation. In terms of the theory, it is the instructor's job to make sure that the language of the activity is not far beyond the students' current level

Conclusion

Finally, the instructor must have some idea as to whether the students understand what is being discussed. It is not necessary to check whether every sentence is understood, nor is it necessary that every sentence be understood. In fact, it would be highly undesirable, as constant checking for comprehension would certainly get in the way of the information exchange that is at the core of the acquisition. A variety of techniques to check comprehension are possible, ranging from directly asking the students whether they understand to merely noting whether their verbal and non-verbal responses indicate comprehension. Clearly the more involved the students are in the activity, the easier it will be to ascertain whether they understand the instructor's and each other's input.

The effectiveness of any acquisition activity can be measured by the interest it evokes in the students to comment on or ask questions about the topics which have been treated. In fact, this spin-off in the form of additional interaction is the most valuable aspect of these activities since real communication normally takes place in these 'follow-ups.'

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