

Teaching Strategies for Oral Communication, Reading and Writing

Teaching Strategies

Each one of the five fundamental principles of the Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA), as well as affecting curriculum development also, affect the teaching strategies used.

In the NLA, the development of the ability to use the second language comes first, before learning any rules about the language, by participating in short conversations right from the beginning of instruction. The authors of the NLA conceptualised for the oral development a sequence of seven steps to encourage students to use, and re-use, a new structure in situations that are slightly different. A brief résumé of these strategies follows :

- Teacher presents a model (answer first, then the question);
- Teacher asks the question to several students who give their personal reply*;
- Several students ask the question to other students, who also give their personal response;
- In pairs, all students ask each other the question and give their personal response in a brief conversational exchange;
- Teacher asks several students to give their partner's answer to the question;
- All the students, in pairs with a different partner, reuse the question and personalized answer a second time, followed by the teacher again asking several students to give their partner's answer to the question;
- Teacher asks several students at random to give the answer of other students in the class to the question asked in order to create a somewhat authentic conversation in the class.

(*All the answer of the students are slightly different as they reflect the student's personal situation or point of view; the underlying structure itself does not change).

The use of two other strategies for teaching oral communication is crucial: The use of complete sentences for all answers to questions and the consistent and immediate correction of oral errors.

The answers given by the students to all questions asked, at the beginning of learning new structures, at least, are always given in complete sentences. The use of this teaching strategy is essential to help the students develop their internal grammar; using words in sentences assists the brain to create the necessary neuronal connections. It is impossible for a learner to develop an internal grammar, a process that depends upon links between words in order to create these neuronal connections. It is impossible for a learner to develop these connections from a ‘vertical’ presentation of the language (lists of vocabulary words, conjugation of verbs); it is necessary to work on the ‘horizontal’ plain, that is at the level of sentences, in order to establish the non-conscious links between the different elements of language. Without an internal grammar, a learner is incapable of communicating spontaneously, with fluency.

Correction of oral errors is also important. If oral errors are not corrected, the internal grammar developed by the learner will be incorrect. In the NLA, correcting oral errors replaces teaching many grammar rules. This strategy is the result of the new conception of accuracy in oral and written language and the relationship between them: knowledge is necessary for written language forms, but oral accuracy is a skill (Germain and Netten, 2001).

For the development of literacy, the authors of the approach have developed two sequences of six teaching strategies, one sequence for the teaching of reading and the other for teaching writing, based on those used in the language arts classroom when teaching first language, but adapted to the learning of an L2 (Germain and Netten, 2012).

For reading, the sequence is as follows:

- contextualisation, so that the students may become aware of the links between what they can already say and what they are going to read;
- prédiction/anticipation, in order to encourage using the reading strategy of interpreting visual and other cognitive clues (such as, logical inferencing) to determine meaning;
- three 'readings', or exploitations, of the text : the first, for general understanding of the meaning of the text; the second, for learning the new relationships between sounds and the way they are written in the L2; and the third, to observe points of grammar in the text (grammar in context), which represents the first introduction of eternal grammar in the learning process;
- post-reading, the last of the six steps, is an activity to integrate the new learnings, (vocabulary, structures, etc.), with those that have been learned or acquired previously.

For writing the strategies are:

- contextualisation, so that the students may become aware of the links between what they can already say and what they can write;
- modelling: the teacher, based on suggestions from the students, writes a short composition on the topic;
- revision: the teacher and the class, together, re-read the composition for its organisation (logical sequence of sentences, appropriateness of words, title, etc.);
- observation of the grammar points already noticed in the reading phase to ensure their correct use;
- adaptation: the teacher asks questions to assist the students to develop their own personal adaptation for the theme; and then each student writes a personal composition;
- post-writing: each student shares his composition with other members of the class, and the class discusses the content of the compositions.

The importance of the use of these strategies is that the students learn that they are able to read and write directly in the L2, based on what they can already communicate orally, what they can say.

As for strategies to reinforce cognitive development, rather than the learning linguistic details about the functioning of the L2, the teacher ensures that, throughout each lesson, what is most

important is the message that the students wishes to transmit. Corrections are inserted in order to clarify the message; the emphasis is not on the learning of grammatical knowledge, but on communicating a message.

There is not a specific series of teaching strategies developed by the authors of the NLA in order to encourage authenticity in the communications in the classroom; but, the use of certain strategies is necessary to ensure authenticity. The first strategy is to adopt a ‘conversational’ style in the classroom; all oral communication in the classroom should follow the sequence of authentic conversations, and should not consist of just one question and one answer, without any follow-up comment. The teacher should react to the answer of a student with a comment or another ‘natural’ question as a follow-up, as in a real conversation, rather than ‘Bien fait’, for example. Furthermore, learners do not repeat sentences that are not authentic for them, simply in order to have them practice a structure. Such practices contribute only to decreasing the motivation of the student.

However, all the language structures to be used in the interactive activities undertaken by the students in pairs or small groups must be previously modelled orally and used in brief exchanges, such as those of the seen steps for oral communication explained above, in order to ensure that the independent use and re-use of the language is relatively correct. During these conversations, the teacher circulates to ensure that correct language is being used, and provides corrections, if required.

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