EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING PHONETIC COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH CONVERSATION GROUPS

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Annotation: This article describes different motivating strategies of how to raise the interest of students to English language acquisition by organizing conversation groups and developing phonetic competence of students.

Keywords: motivation, conversation groups, communication, organization.

Teachers of English as a foreign language face a situation that language teachers lead their students down the road of pattern practice, only to find themselves confronted by a great chasm at the end. On the other side lies real communication, but the group is stranded on the side of drills because the teacher sees no strong bridge across.

Students are not interested only in learning to read and write the new language, they have a desire to speak it. Most students are eager to converse in the new language, and conversation practice therefore assumes primary importance in their learning experience.

In directing conversation session for students of English as a foreign language, we, teachers, must help students to move from pseudo- communication, in which their use of English fictitiously concocted and predictable, to communication where they expresses their ideas needs in the context of reality. During the early stages of conversation practice, you are bound to maintain a fairly controlled situation in which the student interacts with you and other students within the constraints imposed by is limited knowledge of the language. During later stages, you will gradually remove the controls until they are eliminated altogether, and the student enters a realm of real communication.

Setting the stage for conversation practice

Before students embark on conversation practice, obviously they must be familiar with some grammar patterns and vocabulary words. If students have learnt the basic patterns of English in a formal classroom context, these were probably taught through one of two major methods or a combination of both: the audio-lingual approach, and cognitive-code learning.

The Audio-Lingual Approach. This language teaching approach is based on the premise that learning a new language means learning a new system of habits. Basic assumptions in the audio-lingual approach are:

- A linguistic analysis of the new language.
- The new language should be leant through imitation and analogy.
- Every language is patterned. Students must practice these patterns through intensive drills such as repetition of dialogues or through exercises.
- The new language habits must become automatic.
- Allowing the student the possibility of making errors should be avoided, since it is thought that mistakes will lead to bad habits.
- Listening and speaking are viewed as primary activities, and reading and writing secondary.
- Function words (words like articles, prepositions or auxiliary verbs that tie other words together) should receive greater attention in the initial stage of language learning than content words (nouns, adjectives, full verbs which have lexical meaning).
- Audio-visual aids can assist the student in his formation of new language habits.
- Use of the student's native language for explanations of new vocabulary and syntax should be avoided.

Cognitive-Code learning. The major implications in cognitive-code learning are:

- A language is a rule-governed system. Students must learn the rules in a new language through analysis in order to use the language competently.
- Language learning is more than a matter of habit formation; it is a creative process, and therefore the student should be given the opportunity to be as mentally active as possible in all assigned work.
- Drills and exercises should be meaningful.
- The student's creative involvement in the learning process is viewed as more important than the avoiding of errors.
- Reading and writing should be taught at early stages along with listening and speaking.
- Occasional use of the student's native language for explanation of new grammar and vocabulary.

Kinds of conversation groups

Directed conversation practice for students learning English may occur in regular classroom surroundings or in non-academic environments such as conversation clubs or social gatherings at someone's home. Every day thousands of these conversation sessions take place around the world, reflecting the tremendous interest that people everywhere have in learning to speak English.

Academic Conversation Groups. English teaching programs vary but if directed conversation practice is scheduled, it is likely to appear in one of two forms: a brief session or sessions during a given class hour, or a session covering an entire class hour.

If students are enrolled in an intensive program where they have four hours of class, one of the class hours may be devoted to conversation.

Social Conversation Groups. English conversation clubs are organized by teachers and students who want to practice English in a more congenial atmosphere than the classroom may allow. Meetings follow a regular schedule-once a week, for instance. Vital to their success is a dynamic leader who can skillfully arrange entertaining activities such as debates, film showings or games that will stimulate all members to use their English.

Motivational Factors

Most students study English because they believe it will benefit them in one way or another. They see English as a means to earn more money, to fulfill certain education requirements, to travel abroad, to gain access to the culture of English-speaking nations, or simply to meet more people. But even though students' initial motivation may be quite strong, under the strain of learning a new language with all its complexities or pronunciation, syntax. And vocabulary, motivation may wane.

Once your students develop a strong group identity, you will find that they are more motivated to express themselves in English, to become real participants in the activities you plan for them, and ultimately to function as confident English speakers in the world outside the classroom.

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