

Support for CI instruction in professional literature

Evidence of our profession moving in a new direction to better provide for student language acquisition

In the past, foreign language instruction focused primarily on the memorization of words and grammar rules. The standards require a much broader definition of the content of the language classroom, one in which students are given ample opportunities to explore, develop, and use communication strategies, learning strategies, and critical thinking skills, as well as the appropriate elements of the language system and culture.

Unfortunately, as generations of language students have taught us, grammar by itself does not produce individuals who can speak or understand the language that they studied. Foreign languages are not “acquired” when students learn an ordered set of facts about the language (e.g., grammar facts, vocabulary). Students need to be able to use the target language for real communication, that is, to carry out a complex interactive process that involves speaking and understanding what others say in the target language as well as reading and interpreting written materials.

- *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, p. 97*

Probably the best support for story-based methods in the professional literature comes from Richard Donato, Bonnie Adair-Hauck (both professors from the University of Pittsburg) and Philomena Cumo-Johanssen. This article was then published in Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction (currently the most widely used WL methodology textbook in universities) as a chapter (7).

A story-based language approach stresses natural discourse and encourages learners to comprehend meaningful and longer samples of discourse from the very beginning of the lesson.

By introducing the lesson with a whole text, the teacher foreshadows the grammar explanation through the use of integrated discourse that will highlight the critical grammar structures to be taught....In this way the story or text highlights the functional significance of the grammatical structure before the learner's attention is focused on form. Unlike many classroom textbooks, which may offer a group of disconnected sentences or a “contextualized” drill (Walz, 1989), a story-based and guided participatory approach invites the learner to comprehend and experience the functions and purposes of language through integrated discourse, in the form of a story. This practice is in

agreement with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which stresses the importance of comprehensible input that "contains structures a little beyond our current level of competence" (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). As a result, from the very beginning of the lesson, the teacher and learners are engaged in authentic use of language through joint problem-solving activities and interactions to render the story comprehensible. By using pictures, mime, and gestures, the teacher scaffolds (see Chapter 2) and guides the learners eventually to comprehend the story or other sample of connected discourse. Once comprehension is achieved, the teacher can then safely turn the learners' attention to various linguistic elements.

Storytelling is particularly adaptable to second-language instruction, since it is natural to tell stories orally, stressing listening comprehension, followed by role plays and then reading and writing activities. Oller (1983) reminds us that the episodic organization represented in stories aids comprehension and retention. Furthermore using "multiple passes" and recycling the story through picture displays, TPR activities, or role-playing scenarios often deepen comprehension.

The framework of the story provides a continuous flow of mental images that help the learners assign meaning and functions to the forms that they hear. One of the best times for them [the learners] to attend to form is after comprehension has been achieved and in conjunction with their production of meaningful discourse.

-Teacher's Handbook: contextualized language instruction, p. 152-153

In the excerpt below, Marcia Wilbur, director of WL for AP, College Board describes the need for an extensive reading program in WL beginning in level 1 and following throughout the sequence in order to provide students with sufficient language acquisition opportunities to reach higher levels of proficiency.

Second language reading has historically taken a back seat to verbal communication in terms of importance in the beginning and intermediate curricula and may be perceived as a classroom activity teachers engage in if there is time, or as a "reward" for achieving mastery of a particular grammatical structure. Influenced by their own past practices or the way the way they themselves were taught, teachers may believe that students have to first get through language acquisition before they possess the necessary skills to dissect a piece of text. p. 1

Teaching Reading

Second language instructors need to consider the many benefits of engaging in reading as an integral means to second language acquisition (SLA) rather than limit engagement in reading to upper-level literary analysis. Once equipped with the necessary strategies students are generally able to comprehend reading passages slightly beyond their attained level of output proficiency in keeping with Krashen's (1985) $i+1$ theory of comprehensible input, reading becomes an excellent source of learning and vocabulary acquisition. However, given the apprenticeship of observation model (Lortie, 1975) -or lack of model, if reading was an infrequent activity for teaching reading strategies to beginning and intermediate students, teachers may lack the necessary methodology for transmitting those skills. As a result of their own previous language learning experiences, the only teaching of reading classroom teachers any have seen could have been in upper-level L2 literature courses they attended as students (Ruiz-Funes 1999; Tessler & Long, 2000). Bernhardt claims, "most trained teachers have had only between only between one and six hours of instruction in the teaching of reading" (1991, p.177).

A further complication of the issue can be seen in an examination by Gascoigne (2002) of the treatment of reading in beginning college-level L2 textbooks. She concluded that the treatment of L2 reading was absent or lacked pre- and post-reading strategies for students and teachers. Because beginning and intermediate WL instruction is widely guided by a textbook coverage model (Chaffee, 1992), the importance of equipping teachers with a sufficient array of strategies for teaching reading is heightened even more. p.2

Conclusions: Building the Program

A meaningful and successful WL curriculum considers and recognizes the value of all types of reading as essential input that results in students' SLA. Helping to shepherd novice readers through an understanding of the gist of a passage can serve to build the confidence needed to motivate learners; success is a great motivator (Ellis, 1997). Because advanced WL students remain an elective subject in most secondary and post-secondary curricula, students are unlikely to commit to advanced study if their L2 experience is riddled with failure and frustration. If students are provided with the tools, strategies, and steps to become competent L2 readers, they are more likely to continue with long sequences of WL study needed to result in eventual L2 fluency. p. 10

*-Engaging Students in the L2 Reading Process, article from DIMENSION:
Languages for today's world c2006 Southern Conference on Language
Teaching, Marcia L. Wilbur, The College Board*

Jason Fritze
jasonfritze@mac.com