Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

Preview Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate language</td>
<td>Language that is both linguistically correct and that is proper for the situation.</td>
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<td>Authentic sources</td>
<td>Sources used by native speakers or other users of the target language for “real world” communication.</td>
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<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>Learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. Learning occurs through social activity.</td>
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<td>Comprehensible input</td>
<td>Language which can be generally understood by the learner but which contains linguistic items or grammatical patterns that are slightly above the learner’s competence.</td>
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<td>Conscious effort</td>
<td>Effort that learners make deliberately, knowing and understanding the purpose for the action.</td>
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<td>Deductive techniques</td>
<td>Learners are taught the “rules” of language and then expected to apply them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inductive techniques</td>
<td>Learners discover the “rules” of language themselves through their experience with the language.</td>
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<td>Language awareness</td>
<td>A focus on aspects of language within a given context. Paying attention to or noticing the language detail in a context.</td>
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<td>Meta-language</td>
<td>Language used by the teacher and students to talk about language or about learning strategies and techniques.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
<td>Social and cultural aspects of language use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Thinking critically and analytically about language and learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skit</td>
<td>Short dramatic performance.</td>
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Now start the video. Listen to the introduction. Complete the guided observation and reflection tasks for each of the video segments. The next part of the manual is for trainees and is available on separate pages for ease of copying.
Module 2: Building Language Awareness

Introduction, Expanded Narrative

Module 01 in this series focused on the contextual aspect of language input. Module 02 focuses on the details of the language within that context. Both are important for effective and efficient learning. Communicative language learning tends to focus on a holistic, top-down approach to language learning. The focus is more on function, or the use of language in given situations, than it is on form, the linguistic details of language. However, teachers using a communicative approach have discovered that it is also important to focus on language form: on grammar, on vocabulary, on pronunciation, etc. The question has been about how to do this most effectively, without going back to relying only on rules, exercises, rote memory, and drills.

Building language awareness within a given context appears to be one answer to this question. Research has shown that selectively focusing on aspects of language use within a given context can be an effective teaching and learning practice. Language awareness, then, is more than a focus on form. It also includes the use of that form in context, which is called the pragmatic use of language.

Some characteristics of language awareness:
• The use of meta-language to talk about language, its use, and its forms.
• The training of learners to become better, more conscious participants in their own leaning as they do the work of analyzing and reflecting on language and its use.
• A balance of inductive and deductive techniques to focus on specific aspects of language.
• Focus on appropriateness of language used, both situational and cultural.
• The use of comprehensible input in the form of materials from authentic sources.
• The use of language that students are more likely to encounter and use.

Module Focus

In this module, we will be focusing on techniques for helping learners become aware of language forms as they practice language in context. At the beginning of the lesson you will see a primary school class doing a skit called Across the Wide, Dark Sea. It is about the pilgrims, one of the first groups of people to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, in 1621. Their ship was called The Mayflower, and they had a stormy crossing.

Video Segment #1, Classroom Techniques: Observation Guide
[Read before viewing.]

Background: In their preparation for the skit, the children learned about the pilgrims’ journey across the ocean, why the pilgrims left their country, how they felt about leaving, and the things they had to do to survive in the new country. Many of the children in this class are immigrants in a new country.

1. Look for and list three techniques the teacher and her aides used in the skit and the question-answer activity to focus on vocabulary, give students language cues for answers, and help them use previous information to answer questions about their own situations.
2. The third activity was done in groups. Notice what the task was and how the groups got the language information they needed to do the task.
3. Also look for the type of authentic materials the groups used to do their task and how they used them.
Reflection
[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Compare your list with one or more discussion partners. What language teaching techniques did you observe? How are they similar to or different from your own? In what ways do you focus on language specifics in your class(es)?
2. What was the task in the third activity? What were the parts to the task? How did the students get the language information they needed in order to do the task?
3. What was the authentic material the groups used as a stimulus for their activity? Do you think the students had the language skills to get information from this material? What authentic material might you use in your class if you wanted to do this activity?
4. Discuss your reaction to the skit and the related activities. What role did culture play? Content? Context? Has the class you watched given you any ideas for your own class? If so, what?

Module 02 Summary Discussion

1. Review the lists and ideas from the questions above. In your group, try to list your ideas for:
   • Integrated skills activities, such as the skit.
   • What cultural aspects of a target culture might be interesting for your students.
   • How to teach those aspects.
   • Focusing on language within an integrated context.
2. In your group, discuss how you might adapt the ideas from this class to older or adult learners. What context might you use? How would you focus on language within that context?
3. Do you agree with the assumption made in these first two modules, that students can learn more easily and effectively through contextualized language practice and a focus on language within the context? Why or why not? Think particularly of your own students when you answer.
4. After viewing this module, do you think you will try some of these techniques and similar activities in your class? Why or why not? If yes, which ones do you think might be most successful in your situation?
Now You Try It—An Action Plan

**Step 1**
You can read some of the articles on the topic of contextualizing language (see the Module 2 Reading and the List of Additional Readings and Resources below). Using the video, you have seen a few examples and ideas from other teachers’ classes. Now, think about your own classes, what might be interesting to them, and what language they need to learn. Then answer these questions:

- What topic and teaching could you use?
- How would you contextualize the language?
- What materials would you use that would be generally comprehensible, show language in an authentic context so students could analyze it in that context, and that would include language students would be likely to use?

**Step 2**
By yourself or with a peer, design a general outline of a one-hour lesson in which the teaching points are contextualized. For your outline, consider the following:

- What would be the activities? (It is not necessary to list all the steps for each activity.)
- Where you would use meta-language? For what purpose?
- Where you would teach something deductively and where you would let the students figure it out inductively?
- Where and how would you have students look at the language in context and think about its meaning or how it is used?

**Step 3**
Share your outline with others in your group. Explain what the lessons before and after this hour might be about. Get ideas and feedback from the group.

**Step 4**
Rewrite your outline. Try to fill it out with smaller more detailed steps for each activity. Try it with your class. Share your results with others, as applicable. If you are not teaching, ask the trainer or another experienced teacher for feedback.