Productive Language Skills Learning and Teaching: Speaking and Writing


1. SPEAKING

1.1 Definition

Speaking is a productive skill, like writing. It involves using speech to express other meanings to other people. Interaction is two-way communication that involves using language and body language to keep our listener involved in what we are saying and to check that they understand our meaning. Examples of these interactive strategies are: making eye contact, using facial expressions, asking check expressions, clarifying your meaning, confirming understanding. We also speak with fluency and accuracy. Fluency means speaking at a normal speed, without hesitation, repetition or self-correction, and with smooth use of connected speech. Accuracy in speaking is the use of correct forms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. When we speak, we use different aspects of speaking depending on the type of speaking we are involved in.

1.2 Teaching procedure:

Learner's speaking skills are developed by focusing regularly on particular aspects of speaking as fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, body language. In many cases learners do controlled practice activities in which they can use only language that has just been taught. These are a very limited kind of speaking because they just focus on accuracy in speaking and not on communication, interaction or fluency. Controlled practice activities can provide useful, if limited, preparation for speaking. Tasks and less controlled practice activities give more opportunity than controlled activities for learners to practice communication interaction and fluency. Sometimes learners speak more willingly in class when they have a reason for communicating, like giving other classmates some information they need. Because speaking is such a complex skill, learners in the classroom may need a lot of help to prepare for speaking; for instance, practice of necessary vocabulary, time to organise their ideas and what they want to say, practice in pronouncing new words and expressions, practice in carrying out a task, before they speak freely.

1.3 Speaking Lessons

The lesson is divided into three stages:
The obvious purpose of speaking is primarily to communicate, and just as when speaking our mother tongue, gaining confidence is a large part of the battle. Consequently, the tasks are designed so that a successful outcome can be achieved, even where the students’ English is less than perfect. At the same time, however, specific aspects of language are focused on and required in every activity.

A difficulty facing all teachers is how to balance the demand for fluency and accuracy in my students. Fluent speech with errors can often communicate more effectively than accurate but painfully hesitant speech. This may bring teachers to wonder what our role should be. The role of the teacher depends on the stage of the lesson and the nature of the activity. The stages of the lesson are clearly marked, and guidelines are given on what the teacher needs to be doing at any point.

The teacher is the centre of attention early in the lesson, when the topic is introduced and when any essential language needs to be revised and corrected. Once this has been done and instructions have been given, the teacher’s role is more discreet, checking that students are following instructions, monitoring progress, giving help where needed and settling disagreements.

In general, once learners have begun speaking, the best strategy is to monitor without interfering too much. Stopping the activity in order to correct students is best avoided unless an error is so serious that it makes it impossible for the others to understand or complete the task. Making minor corrections without halting the flow, or joining in briefly, using the correct forms as a reminder, are more successful as this allows the activity to continue naturally. Collecting anonymous sample sentences for class correction later provides useful feedback while avoiding interruption and embarrassment.
2. WRITING

2.1 Definition

Writing and speaking are productive skills. That means they involve producing language rather than receiving it. Actually, we can say that writing involves communicating a message (something to say) by making signs on a page. To write we need a message and someone to communicate it to. We also need to be able to form letters and words, and to join these together to make words, sentences or a series of sentences that link together to communicate that message. Writing involves several subskills. Some of these related to accuracy, that is to say, using correct forms of language. Writing accurately means spelling correctly, forming letters correctly, writing legibly, punctuating correctly, using correct layouts, choosing the right vocabulary, using grammar correctly, joining sentences correctly and using paragraphs correctly. But writing isn’t just about accuracy. It is also about having a message and communicating it successfully to other people. To do this, we need to have enough ideas, organise them well and express them in an appropriate style. Finally, writing also often involves going through a number of stages. When we write outside the classroom we go through these stages:

1. Brainstorming (thinking of everything we can about the topic)
2. Making notes
3. Planning (organising our ideas)
4. Writing a draft (a piece of writing that is not yet finished, and may be changed)
5. Editing (correcting and improving the text)
6. Proof-reading (checking for mistakes in accuracy) or editing again.

2.2 Teaching procedure

The subskills of writing that we teach will vary a lot, depending on the age and needs of our learners. At this advanced level we may need to focus more on the skills required to write longer texts such as letters, emails or compositions. When we teach writing, special attention is given to both accuracy, to build up and to communicate a specific message. Sometimes, in the classroom, learners are asked to write a composition about a certain topic, but this activity needs a context and a reason to be made as the real life requires it. By encouraging learners to use the writing process according to their needs having their own portfolio, we help them to be creative and to develop their message, in other words, what they want to say.

2.2.3 Writing Lessons Scheme

The lesson is divided into these three stages:
Each writing activity focuses on a practical task which explores the style and content of a particular form thus encourages students to develop their own pieces in a supportive atmosphere. By pairing an imaginative student with a more linguistically confident classmate, the teacher can enable both to produce a better piece of writing than either could produce on their own. Encouraging students to draft initially on alternate lines also enables them to refine their piece later on without rewriting the whole thing. By promoting such focused drafting, redrafting and self-assessment, using the material of the Writing charts the Appendix, I encourage students to take control of their own learning.

Through realistic real-world content and a mix of light and serious topics, all writing lessons encourage students to draw their already existing knowledge and skills in their written pieces: supported by models and templates they produce realistic written texts through a process of informed criticism. This releases the classroom teacher to become audience and assistant, constantly monitoring and offering support and advice. Once piece is finished the teacher can join with the student, who may well become their own best critic, in evaluating the piece.

**Bibliografía**

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