

Teaching for Communicative Competence: Interaction in the Classroom

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Research Finding: A growing body of research shows that interaction aids in second language acquisition (SLA) (Ellis, 1999).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the instructional framework for interaction. In CLT the instruction involves providing opportunities to interact in the target language. The goal is to gain competence in communicating in English. This means the learner is able to understand and interpret messages, understand the social contexts in which language is being used, apply the rules of grammar, and use strategies to keep communication from breaking down (Savignon, 1997).

Learners create a language system, known as an interlanguage, derived from their native language and the target language. This is their internalized language system. They make changes in their interlanguage when they recognize that their communication is breaking down. This process of interlanguage development is affected when language learners interact with native speakers and more proficient nonnative speakers in the classroom.

Application to Practice

This research finding is applied in interactive classroom instruction. The teacher initiates the interaction, but it is more effective when the learners control the topics and discourse (Brown, 2001; Ellis, 1999).

Suggested Interactive Classroom Activities:

1. Information Gap – Two people share information to complete a task.
2. Jigsaws – Learners pool their information to complete a task.
3. Conversation Grid Activities – Practice gathering and giving the same information over and over again, thus helping to build automaticity
4. Ordering and sorting activities, including classification, ranking and sequencing
5. Problem-solving activities at all levels
6. Discussions in which they practice any number of language development skills.

Summarized by Bella Hanson.

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