

A PROCESS-ORIENTED APPROACH TO TEACHING

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RESUMO

Neste artigo são analisadas as características de um curso de leitura em que a autoconfiança é a principal condição para a consecução dos objetivos propostos. A aprendizagem centrada no aluno, no processo e no discurso são os pontos fundamentais da abordagem de ensino adotada. Os pressupostos teóricos fundamentais da elaboração e implementação do programa são examinados.

The purpose of the present paper is twofold: first, to consider the main features of an approach to teaching where self-confidence is the essential condition to achieve competence; second, to submit the audience practical applications of the concepts presented so that some aspects of methodology can be appreciated.

1 INTRODUCTION

Brazilian students arrive at the university as false beginners of English, barring a small number aiming at teachers' or translators' careers, the students view English as an ancillary subject needed to broaden the scope of their academic studies. To provide for their needs and/or wants, English for Specific Purposes - ESP - courses are offered.

Expecting conventional classes where simplified texts are painfully decoded word by word as corresponding grammar issues are

explained, the students are shocked to be faced with genuine texts taken from their specialized books, current journals and news magazines. The shock might generate frustration rather than confidence if teachers were not equipped to cope with the situation. Used to being taught in usual foreign language methods, the students can hardly believe that this somewhat awkward way of learning English will work.

2 THE APPROACH

2.1 Rationale

Emphasis is placed on self-confidence in that the whole syllabus design is based on the learner's awareness of the potentialities, knowledge and abilities he brings to the course rather than on his lacks and deficiencies. In addition to a concept of reading and a concept of learning, this view involves a concept of competence. Competence is here understood on the light of Widdowson's ideas (1983:7-8;106-7). Competence is not seen as an objective of instruction but as a long-term educational aim that will be achieved by the individual long after the end of the course if this has provided for the learner's own capacity to be developed.

A series of aspects should be considered when describing the approach. First, without attempting to deny the role of the teacher as responsible for the classroom, provision is made to move teacher and learner along the continuum of task responsibility (Pearson, 1985:736) so that the learner takes up total responsibility of his learning at the end of course of instruction. Thus learner-centredness is a vital aspect of the approach.

Second, reading is seen as the conscious psycholinguistic process whose components should be analysed by the reader-learner so that

he becomes able to monitor their operation. Reading is a high active and productive skill that implies an intense interaction between reader and writer. The reader is continuously forming, testing, rejecting, accepting hypothesis that lead to the eventual creation of meaning (Smith; 1971:25-6; Goodman, 1976:498).

Third, since long reading instruction has focused on the reading passage as the most important element of the programme, To this view, full comprehension of the text appears as the most relevant component of the whole syllabus. Accordingly, instruction is conducted by means of product-type questions that assess whether comprehension took place but do not guide or encourage its processing.

A new perspective, however, capitalizes on the reader/writer interaction gearing the reader to the centre of the process. The cognitive operations that are triggered while the learner interacts with the text are far more important for the learning to be developed than the actual meaning of the passage. In short, the approach is process-oriented.

2.2 Description

Three stages can be distinguished in the present reading course: introspection, self-confidence and consolidation. Hosenfeld's thinking aloud and introspective/retrospective technique (1984:231-2) mostly inspire the first phase. An effort to break away from the learner's previous unsuccessful foreign language learning experience characterizes the second phase. The last one attempts to operationalize reading in English as a feasible task and an attainable goal.

2.2.1 Introspection

By learning to introspect, the learner

becomes aware of the various cognitive processes that take place in his mind whenever his eyes meet a printed page. The awareness thus aroused is the ground on which to anchor the skills needed to monitor the reading strategies and techniques that he will develop later on. The approach starts from the learner's own knowledge and experience (Ausubel, 1968:37-87) reading in Portuguese.

The most relevant element of the exercises designed is not the activity they involve but the awareness of how this activity is performed. The student is stimulated to verbalize the path followed, clues used, miscues rejected, hypotheses accepted or not accepted to arrive at meaning. Analysing his own reading the learner starts to understand how he reads, what reading involves and how he can learn to monitor his own reading process.

2.2.2 Self-confidence

The first text in English is intended to destroy the myth the student has created that the only text he is able to read is the simplified foreign-language-learner-reading passage. Caution to avoid frustration is paramount and the activities devised should be geared at a level simple enough to virtually ensure their satisfactory completion (Quandt and Selznick, 1984:19).

As far as instruction progresses, the discovery of unthought of avenues of reading are unveiled. Purpose choice, level of comprehension selection, reading speed adjustment, reading techniques and strategies development, information processing, all these aspects are exploited through activities that tend to be not only meaningful but also rewarding. Perceiving that he himself is able

to decide and act accordingly as far as his reading is concerned is the second important step in this pedagogic therapeutical treatment aiming at self-confidence.

2.2.3 Consolidation

The cyclic character of the syllabus should be borne in mind. Since the reading process cannot be screened into successive operations, the learner is always encouraged to use reading skills and strategies at different levels of delicacy. From the very beginning, he is stimulated to read for gist, for specific information, for main ideas and for critical judgement. The last stage of the syllabus, of course, demands a deeper work.

In this brief communication, it is quite impossible to attempt complete coverage of the third stage: consolidation. Though each stage is substantial at its own right, this one is the longest, the hardest and the one meant to consolidate and guarantee the success of the educational process previously carried out. Its most outstanding component is the concern with text organization and function.

Endeavour is made to help the student grasp the overall structure of the text so that he can be able to identify main ideas, locate discourse markers, and eventually make sense of the intricate network of cohesive devices that make up the written message. The learner gradually progresses from general to detailed comprehension as he links global understanding to main points and supporting ideas within the framework of the whole text.

3 CONCLUSION

The approach put forth in this communication

claims to be dynamic. Rooted in Ausubel's (1968) cognitive view of meaningful learning and stemming from a psycholinguistic concept of reading (Smith, 1971; Goodman, 1976) the approach strives to keep abreast with the recent advances in the area. Feedback is sought not only in research carried out in the country and abroad but also in the daily silent patient study and classroom work of the teachers engaged in the ESP team of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

NOTE:

*Paper presented at the 15th World Congress on Language Learning-Competence through Confidence, Helsinki, Finland, July 1985.

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