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METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH

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RESUMO:

O objetivo do trabalho é considerar alguns aspectos metodológicos de uma abordagem centrada no aluno e suas implicações. O uso de entrevistas com pequenos grupos, como parte de um curso de leitura, é descrito e discutido. As vantagens desse procedimento são apresentadas, bem como as reações dos alunos. A maior vantagem parece ser a oportunidade do professor vir a conhecer melhor a maneira como seus alunos aprendem a ler em inglês.

The objective of this paper is to consider some methodological aspects and their implications in the student-centered approach.

The planning of any ESP course involves a number of aspects such as the specification of students' aims, the "teaching points", the methodology, the teaching materials, the number of students, the teaching load, evaluation and so on; many of these aspects can be discussed with the students before or during the course.

One of them - the teaching load - is the reason for teachers' anxiety and sometimes frustration: few classes and yet ... a lot to be achieved. The number of hours per week usually varies in different univer-

sities and it is not always controlled by the teacher. What can be done?

After trying several things, a more successful procedure was adopted : some time from the regular classes could be used for "interviews" with small groups of students. The first time this procedure was adopted the interviews were recorded because the course was part of a research (Figueiredo, 1984).

In these interviews individual problems or difficulties can be discussed in a more effective way considering either what was previously done in class or at home by each student.

It is important that the students understand the main objective of these interviews with smaller groups: they can get more individualized attention and can also have chances to progress according to their own pace - they do not have to wait for the others to begin reading an extra text; on the contrary, as soon as he is satisfied with his comprehension of a text, he can take a different or more complex one.

Some of the difficulties students tend to have are very similar or even expected by the teacher. These difficulties can then be discussed by the students themselves so that they understand the kind of problems they have: sometimes just by verbalizing, or in other words, by organizing their thoughts, students are able to solve their own problems. This also avoids teacher's interference.

The main focus given during the interviews is "how to read", that is, the focus is reading itself, not correcting or doing reading exercises. Many of the students' difficulties or problems can then be better understood.

Complaints such as "Eu tenho dificuldade até em português : eu sou péssimo em leitura" or "O dicionário sempre desaponta a gente. Você tem que aprender a se virar" can be used as starting points for discussions about concepts like proficient reading, lan-

guage learning transfer, different ways of dealing with a text, use of the dictionary and so on. As these topics are discussed, it is a good idea to have a summary (by one or two students) at the end of the class so that they get to some conclusions by themselves.

Along the development of this procedure it is suggested that ready-made solutions are *not* presented to the students. The idea is to provide them with meaningful and relevant information without imposing ideal techniques when reading a text. It means that the teacher's role can be *asking* questions and not necessarily answering them: questions like "Why do you read this way?", "How did you find your answers?", "What do you think about ...?" make students think about what they do when reading, about their concepts of reading strategies and also about the information they get from the texts.

In this way, Smith's ideas (1978) are being put into practice: the importance of the teacher's knowledge about the reading process and the way it can affect his performance in the classroom. In other words, the more the teacher knows about *reading*, the more he will be able to make adequate choices concerning the teaching-learning process. And, very important, the more the student knows about his own way of reading, the more he will be ready to accept suggestions and changes.

Another aspect to be mentioned is the students' attitude towards these interviews: they usually react favorably to this idea because they have systematic chances to discuss their individual problems in a time specially devoted to them. This means the interviews are not considered traditional classes when the "task" is given by the teacher after some explanation. On the contrary, the "task" is often suggested by the students according to their interests and difficulties.

Besides, the students are particularly relaxed

during the interviews : they think it is not so difficult to talk about their problems after all, they laugh at their obvious questions and usually do not show any resistance or hostility when their classmates contribute with explanations. It is important to note that this active participation during the interviews is essential to develop students' acceptability as to the need of changes in their way of reading ... specially when it is not successful.

One somehow unexpected reaction in this kind of procedure is the students' gradual interest in learning more about the English language, about the way it works and even about pronunciation : it seems that by the time the students understand that English is not the only source of difficulty in their reading, they tend to appreciate it more.

A more critical attitude towards the texts is also a consequence of having more time for discussion with small groups of students : they themselves feel the need to discuss and evaluate the information they read as they are incentivated to interact with the text, to contribute with more information and to analyse the effect of all this in their reading comprehension.

Another interesting aspect in this procedure is that during the interviews it is easier for the teacher to notice if the students are really using the reading strategies suggested in class, if they are translating or trying something else...

This is then a good opportunity for the teacher to learn a bit more about the way(s) his students learn how to read in English.

REFERENCES

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