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CURRENT TRENDS IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Current Trends in Teaching Listening and Speaking

Summarized by Mach Buu Hien [1]

This article examines current trends of teaching listening and speaking skills and the author also highlights some crucial terminology, contemporarily used in the professional discourse. First of all, the author reviews purposes for learning English, in which English is no longer regarded as the property of English-speaking countries, but English is viewed as an international language for those who use it. This also means that learners of English do not necessarily seek to study or speak with a native-like accent and set this as his or her learning goals.

Teaching Listening

Together with the shift of learning purposes, the status of teaching listening has changed and focused on the role of comprehension and comprehensible input. The theoretical models of comprehension which were borrowed from the field of cognitive psychology by applied linguists led to the requirement for the distinction between bottom-up and top-down processing. These approaches emphasize the importance of background knowledge and schema in comprehension. More specifically, the bottom-up approach is a linear, data-driven process which listeners can improve their comprehension by successfully decoding the spoken text. Meanwhile, using the top-down approach requires listeners to actively construct the meaning based on expectations, inferences, intentions, knowledge of schema and other relevant existing knowledge and utilize a selective processing of the input. Mendelsohn (1994) also indicates underlying current methodologies of teaching listening as:

- A wide range of authentic texts, including monologues and dialogues should be used for listening practice
- Schema-building tasks should be used before listening
- Strategies for effective listening should be included into the materials
- Learners should continuously structure their listening by listening to a text several times and work through increasingly challenging listening tasks
- Learners should know the purpose and the reason of their listening
- Tasks should provide opportunities for learners to play an active role in their own learning.

Teaching Speaking

The nature of speaking skills and the approaches to teaching these skills have witnessed a major change in recent years. The advent of the constructs of communicative competence and proficiency in the 1980s resulted in important changes in conceptions of syllabuses and methodology. Notably, communicative

[1] From Richards, JC. (2003). Current trends in teaching listening and speaking. **The Language Teacher. (Vol. 27. No. 7.** Pp. 3-6). Oxford University Press. (www.finchpark.com/courses/tkt/Unit_07/teacher3.pdf)

syllabuses, including notional and functional syllabuses as well as task-based and text-based approaches were subsequently proposed. In the 1990s, a parallel interest in foreign language teaching led to the proficiency movement, which offered an organizing principle to help teachers set up their course objectives, organize course content, and decide what students should be able to do for the completion of the course or the program.

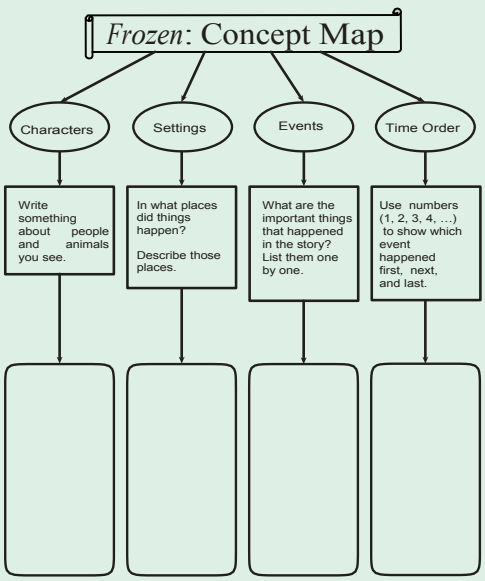
The notion of English as an International Language has led to the emergence of the notion of intercultural competence in teaching speaking. This notion emphasizes on learning ways of communicating in appropriate cross-cultural settings. Simultaneously, it is also accepted that models of oral interactions should be structured on the findings of both conversation analysis and corpus analysis, rather than merely based on the intuitions of applied linguists and textbook writers. From these concepts, several principles when teaching speaking, including the clausal nature of much spoken language, the role of chunks, the frequency of fixed utterances, the interactive and negotiated nature of oral interaction, and the differences between interactional and transactional talk should be taken into account.

After reviewing typical shifts, the author summarizes some principles of current approaches to the teaching of speaking skills:

- Speaking and oral interaction is considered as the basis for learning.
- Both native and non-native usage can serve as models for teaching and learning speaking.
- English for cross-cultural communication is a major goal.
- The information from corpus analysis can be used as models in classroom materials.
- Functional and other types of communicative syllabuses predominate.
- Accuracy and fluency are a primary goal with a tolerance of errors.
- Oral proficiency depends on the mastery of lexical phases and conversational routines.
- Cultural awareness is addressed.
- Pair and group activities are mostly conducted in the classroom.

Reference:

Hadley, A. O. (1993). Teaching Language in Context. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
Mendelsohn, D. J. (1994). Learning to Listen: A strategy-based Approach for the Second-Language Learner. San Diego: Dominie Press.



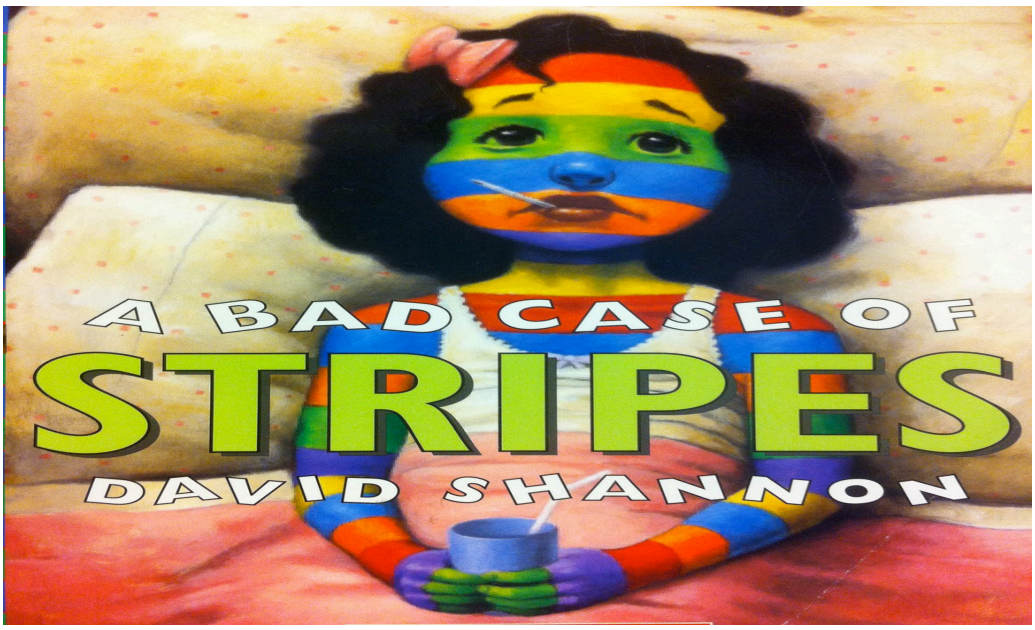
Using Concept Mapping to Teach Young EFL Learners Reading Skills

Summarized by Do Kieu Anh [(2)]

In this article, the authors introduced an effective strategy called "concept mapping" to help EFL elementary students tackle their reading problems. "Concept mapping" is defined as the use of visual tools which enable children comprehend reading material by transferring "the written content into concrete images". The authors also discussed the benefits of using this strategy including (1) helping students understand the framework of the subject being taught; (2) clarifying the relationships and connections among all instructional content; (3) reinforcing

[2] From Teo, A., Shaw, Y. F., Chen, J., & Wang, D. (2016). Using Concept Mapping to Teach Young EFL Learners Reading Skills. **English Teaching Forum(Vol. 54, No. 2**, pp. 20-26). US Department of State. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs, SA-5, 2200 C Street NW 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20037 (https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/etf_54_2_pg20-26.pdf)

knowledge retention; and (4) enhancing an instructor's teaching objectives. Additionally, they described two reading lessons in which this strategy was used to produce beneficial effects for young learners.



In the first lesson, they chose a picture book entitled Frozen and its movie because this story is popular and its plot is easy for children to understand. They initially allowed students to watch the movie in their first language but with English subtitles before showing the kids the picture book as well as asking them to narrate the story in a chronological order. After that, they introduced a pre-made concept map which contains 4 categories, namely (1) characters, (2) settings, (3) events, and (4) time order and asked students to fill in these categories. This was followed by an activity in which students were paired up or grouped to draw their own concept maps and rewrite their versions of the story creatively by adding any characters or events. Finally, students were invited to share their stories with their class and discuss the differences between others' work with theirs with a focus on how they organized the events in their stories.

In the second lesson, the picture book named A Bad Case of Stripes was chosen because it has many elements that support making predictions and inferences. Firstly, teachers used concept maps to teach key vocabulary terms and encouraged students to make predictions without passing out copies of the storybook. Teachers then read the first two pages of the story and asked students to predict how the story would continue before reading the third and fourth pages and discussing the differences between their predictions and what actually took place in the story. This process was repeated with other pages of the story.

After describing two lessons, the authors suggested some criteria for choosing the stories as well as some principles in using concept map strategy. They also concluded that teachers should make necessary adjustments to the activities depending on students' learning needs, language proficiency levels and progress in order to make their lessons successful.

Livening Your iBT and IELTS Writing Classes

Summarized by Bui Thi Thuc Quyen [3]

It is generally accepted that of the four language skills, writing is the least interesting to teach. This is especially true when it comes to TOEFL iBT& IELTS writing classes because of their formalities. It is, therefore, teachers' job that stimulates their students and facilitates the writing process. The paper presents a few simple tactics the author has used to inspire students in her TOEFL iBT and IELTS writing lessons.

- On the first class, be well-prepared, make the class enjoyable, give clear instructions about the outline and the aim of the course, and inform the students what they are supposed to do during the course.
- Create good rapport with students and try to understand students' background, difficulties and feeling about writing.
- Set goals and tasks at which most of the students can be successful.
- Incorporate elements of the product and process oriented approaches in designing writing tasks.
- Sometimes replace or modify lessons and tasks in the assigned textbooks with something else to provoke their students' interest and involvement.
- Use pair work/ group work/class discussion to make the writing class communicative.
- Employ visual aids for presentation and exercises.
- Keep class diary.
- Move around while students are writing to gather students' interesting ideas and their common mistakes.
- Sometimes, ask students to share their work with other students in class.
- Give students writing practice under time pressure.
- Sometimes do the writing tasks with students in the allotted time.
- Provide students feedback on their work, using a list of correction keys.
- Give positive and encouraging comments, even to bad work,
- Ensure that students understand their mistakes and give them time to ask questions for clarifying.
- Check and return students' work quickly.
- For IELTS, encourage students to bring strange or new tasks from outside sources to work in class.
- Recommend some useful writing websites to students so that they can practice outside the classroom.
- Sometimes provide students with some kinds of entertainment in their writing class.

[3] From Paper presented by Nguyen Thi Thuy Loan at the International Conference "Innovations in Language Teaching and Learning" HCMC 23-24 Sep. 2010

5 Real Life Listening Skills Your Students Need

Summarized by Mach Buu Hien [4]

LISTENING IS SOMETHING WE DO EVERYDAY

In order to help students improve their listening skills, teachers are advised to take five real life listening skills into thorough consideration because these are the keys that students need to do to understand what they hear every day.

1. Students need to **determine** what they are hearing
   Determining types of the speech they are hearing is essential because this helps them know what listening skills they will need to engage. For example, listening to a conversation is different from listening to a lecture or watching a television program.
2. Students need to **understand** what they are hearing
   Encouraging students to place more emphasis on listening to phrases, patterns of speech and ideas rather than focusing on every word of the speaker is important to help them understand what they are hearing. Moreover, to assess students' understanding, teachers are advised not to ask about specific words or quotations, but question about the meaning of units, ideas and how they relate to each other.
3. Students need to **guess** what is coming next
   It is important that students need to predict what is coming next. Making predictions will help students understand and process language better because when they have an idea of what is happening next, they will be able to prepare a mental place for the information as it arrives from the speaker.
4. Students need to **remember** what they already know about the subject
   "Learning is about making connections" can be regarded as one of the crucial strategies to help students understand what they hear. In other words, students will understand and remember information better when they connect it with what they already know. Therefore, teachers need to help students remember their existing knowledge before or during listening practice.
5. Students need to **decide** what the speaker means
   In order to understand the speaker or his implied meaning, students need to be able to determine the intended meaning and be prepared to decode that meaning beyond the surface of the words they hear and understand.

These five essential skills will help students become active listeners who are able to understand, predict, recall and analyze what they are hearing in their real life.

[4] http://busyteacher.org/15732-5-real-life-listening-skills-your-students-need.html

NEWS

The 8th Annual International Conference on TESOL at SEAMEO RETRAC

SEAMEO RETRAC has started the promotion of the annual international conference on TESOL in 2017 on the Center's website and via different channels of mass media. According to the released information, the 8th International Conference on TESOL will be jointly organized by the SEAMEO Regional Training Center in Vietnam and Curtin University in Australia.

The conference provides an excellent venue for academics, researchers, students and professionals in the field of English language education to share and discuss research findings, experiences, and practical and theoretical issues related to the teaching of English to learners of different backgrounds, levels, interests and motives.

Conference Theme: ELT in the 21st Century: Challenges & Opportunities

Sub themes:

- Fostering learner autonomy in ELT
- Redefining the roles of teacher and learner in ELT
- Creating an engaging environment in ELT
- Linking English learning in the classroom to the real world

Time & Venue:

- Date: August 10-11, 2017
- Venue: SEAMEO RETRAC, 35 Le Thanh Ton Street, Ben Nghe Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
- Website: http://www.vnseameo.org/TESOLConference2017/

Training Workshops on Teaching Methodology to University and College Lecturers of English

SEAMEO RETRAC in collaboration with Regional English Language Office (RELO) conducted 2 courses on Innovative English Language Teaching for 60 college and university lecturers of English in pedagogy from February 21st to 25th, 2017. The focus areas of the courses included (1) Effective ways of teaching English involving the use of corpora; (2) The teaching of pragmatics/culture; and (3) Innovative ways of English grammar/vocabulary assessment. Dr. Dilin Liu, Department of English, The University of Alabama, the U.S.A was in charge of facilitating the training courses.

The courses aimed to share knowledge and experience in English language teaching and learning in Vietnam context through those applications of Corpus Linguistics. Besides, the courses help the learners be able to apply those strategies in their English teaching and learning and share what they have learned with other lecturers in the faculty.

Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) Program

The Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) Program provides international teachers with a unique opportunity to develop greater expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge about the United States. The TEA Program is a six-week non-degree, non-credit customized academic program including seminars on new teaching methodologies, curriculum development, lesson planning, and instructional technology. Participants also take part in a practicum in a U.S. secondary school near their host university where they work closely with U.S. teachers and teach, co-teach and present information about their home countries to U.S. students. Cultural enrichment, mentoring, and support are provided throughout the program. The international participants will travel to the United States for one of two six-week professional development programs in either spring of 2018 or fall of 2018.

For further details, please go to the website:
https://vn.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2017/02/TEA-Program-Announcement-FY17-Vietnam.pdf

Online Course on Teaching for Success: Learning and Learners

This free online course is for English language teachers around the world. It will help you develop the skills and practices you need for your continuing professional development (CPD).

This course aims to help participants:

- Compare teaching approaches and experience with others from around the world.
- Reflect on the factors involved in learner motivation and consider the implications for our teaching practice.
- Discuss different types of knowledge and what a teacher needs to know.
- Evaluate ways to check understanding and practice language.
- Identify and value diversity, and apply strategies to promote inclusive education.
- Evaluate different types of assessment and reflect on assessment criteria and activities for speaking and writing.

For further details, please go to the website: https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/english-language-teaching-learning

More Teaching Materials

ESL Resources

http://www.surreylibraries.ca/programs-services/4875.aspx
http://fergusonlibrary.org/learn-explore/research-guides/a-to-z-databases/

Teaching English Language Skills

http://www.esolcourses.com/content/topicsmenu/listening.html
http://www.world-english.org/
http://www.englishdaily626.com/

FUN CORNER

Reginald's New Diet

Reginald was terribly overweight, so his doctor placed him on a strict diet.

'I want you to eat regularly for two days, then skip a day, and repeat this procedure for two weeks. The next time I see you, you'll have lost at least five pounds, 'his doctor assured him.

When Reginald returned he shocked his doctor by having lost almost twenty pounds.

'Why, that's amazing,' the doctor said, greatly impressed, 'You certainly must have followed my instructions.'

Reginald nodded, 'I'll tell you what though, I thought I was going to drop dead on the third day.'
'Why, from hunger?' asked his doctor.

'No, from all that skipping.'

Fun at the Movies

Last week Ronnie Walsh went to the movies at the Rialto Cinema in Bristol to see "Slumdog Millionaire" but because of two women loudly chatting together who were sitting in the row in front of him, Ronnie was unable to hear the dialogue clearly.

Ronnie leaned forward and said in a stage whisper, 'Excuse me ladies but I can't hear.'

'I should hope not,' stormed the woman, 'this is a private conversation.'

Nobel Prize

Bob is walking down a country road when he spots Farmer Harris standing in the middle of a huge field of corn doing absolutely nothing. Bob, curious to find out what's happening, walks all the way out to the farmer and asks him, 'Excuse me Farmer Harris, could you tell me what you are doing?'

'I'm trying to win a Nobel Prize,' the farmer replies.

'A Nobel Prize?' enquires Bob, puzzled. 'How?'

'Well, I heard they give the Nobel Prize to people who are out standing in their field.'

(Source: http://www.guy-sports.com/humor/stories/index_short.htm)

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