Choosing and differentiating instructions in language teaching

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Abstract

Teaching a foreign language involves learning how to use the language and engaging in conversation. One must practice and gain expertise to utilize the language within and outside the classroom. Most students may find it challenging for various reasons, such as a lack of interaction during the learning process, tasks emphasizing knowledge acquisition over language proficiency, an unbalanced focus on receptive and productive skills, and personality factors. They will, therefore, probably be unable to communicate through language effectively. However, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method offers a promising solution, emphasizing interaction, authentic materials, and the integration of receptive and productive skills. Bringing the outside world into the classroom addresses these challenges and enhances the learning experience for both students and educators.

Keywords

Interact, authentic materials, receptive skills, productive skills, input, output, Communicative Language Teaching, productivity, differentiated instruction, individualization.

In many countries, transitioning from the traditional grammar-translation method to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method requires the development of curriculum requirements and resources. The CLT method, when implemented, focuses on developing learners' language skills for both classroom and real-life situations. A key aspect of this method is using authentic materials, which serve as a bridge between classroom learning and real-world application. Successful CLT classes help integrate listening, speaking, and writing skills by encouraging learners to communicate.

If communicative language is taught, its learning success should be assessed not based on grammar and pronunciation but on the learner`s ability to perform and interact with the language[1]. That is to say, if we are supposed to teach the CLT method, we have to assess our students` evaluation based on their communicative competence. Sometimes, designing materials and creating activities to meet the needs of learners can be challenging. These problems can be effectively addressed by differentiating the instruction for the activity or modifying it, catering to learners' diverse needs, and enhancing their learning experience.

Now, we will attempt to analyze and modify the activities that apply to the CLT method:

Activity: Drawing interpretation (original version)

Aim: fluency practice, reading comprehension, reading interpretation, class cohesion.

Level: all levels

Time: fluid.

Procedure

1. After reading a poem, story, essay, book, or article, ask students to draw a quick drawing of what they consider to be the reading's central or most important idea.

2. In small groups, each student holds up their picture while the others interpret the image.

3. The student who drew the picture tells others what they had in mind and what they might have learned from them.

4. The whole group discusses the meaning of the reading and how it might have changed for them as they looked at and talked about the pictures.

Notes:
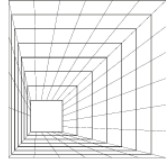
- Some students may protest that they don't know how to draw. For them, demonstrate with some stick figures, lines, and circles to show them that you don't expect artistry.
- This activity works best if you set a time limit for drawing no more than three minutes [2].

Modified version: Can you read my mind?

Aim: fluency practice, listening comprehension, reading interpretation, critical thinking.

Level: all levels.

Time: 25 minutes (5 minutes for drawing or writing)

Preparation:

Choose three videos, including short poems on different themes (suggested video links from www.youtube.com for intermediate level:

https://youtu.be/eRLJscAlk1M
https://youtu.be/h1fdd-KF5Bc
https://youtu.be?43wFhXaXxvo)

 Each video should last no more than 2 minutes.

- Divide your group into two subgroups: Group A and Group B.
- Ask all students to watch the video and choose the best video they like.
- Each student in group A draws a picture associated with the video; students in group B write a short reflection including 50 words to express their feelings about the video they chose.
- After finishing the work, ask students to exchange their work with students from the other group.
- In turn, group A students will read the reflection and should find out which video this reflection refers to; group B students will see the pictures, find the source, and describe the image.
- At the end, students will give their feedback on their work.

The activity was modified from the "Drawing interpretation" activity provided by Natalie Hess. The original activity was based on developing reading comprehension and fluency practice for individual learning: After reading a story, poem, or essay, students must draw pictures illustrating their comprehension of a text. They all hold their pictures, describe them, and explain their understanding. After listening to each other`s interpretation and watching the pictures, students discuss the reading and what they have learned together.

However, in the modified version, a considerable emphasis was placed on receptive and productive skills, including integrating all skills. Furthermore, it facilitates learners to enhance their critical thinking, which develops students` communicative skills, overlook, and personality. In this activity, students work in 2 groups. Both groups watch three prepared videos, enabling learners to listen to 3 poems read by authors with different contents. Group A's members choose one poem they like best and draw a picture associated with their feelings and impressions of the poem. Members of group B also chose the poem, but they were all supposed to write short reflections consisting of 50-60 words on the poem they liked. After finishing writing reflections and drawing pictures, students raise their hands and exchange their work with their mates from another group. It isn't necessary to wait for all members to finish and then exchange their work: if a student from group A has finished drawing, he can raise his hand and exchange it with the work of a student from group B who has also finished writing a reflection. After reading the reflection and observing the pictures, students of both groups must find which poem they refer to and explain their opinions. At the end of the activity, students return work to the owners, and they give feedback on their pictures and reflections.

As said above, EFL teachers often encounter students with difficulty with their productive skills even though they can easily comprehend input. While listening to a listening task,
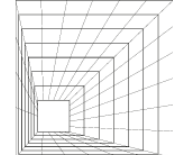
students receive information by evaluating and reconstructing as they listen and produce a product that is close in meaning to the original one. Having analyzed the work prepared by their group mates, students are supposed to produce spoken discourse. One of the criteria of the CLT method is the development of fluency. Teachers should choose fluency-based tasks referring to several criteria, so some of them were taken into consideration while modifying this activity:

- Productivity – they listen to the poems and express their feelings by writing reflections and drawing pictures.
- Interactivity- by using their reading skills and observing the pictures, they produce discourse and discuss it in groups.
- Challenge: Enabling students to feel a sense of achievement while deciding the source of the work (poem) [3].

The next thing emphasized while modifying activity is personalization and individualization, which are accounted for by differentiated instructions. One of the main factors when applying activities to classes is to consider the student's needs, style, and level so that all learners, regardless of these factors, can participate during the lesson.

Individualization is the best choice to meet learners` needs rather than preparing different time-consuming activities with different complexity[4]. This activity is created based on personalization, which enables learners to associate the poem with their own experience, and individualization, which allows students to finish and exchange the product without waiting for the whole group. This is mainly because the learners have different rates of performance and levels of competence.

As said above, any task should have challenging criteria, so students have to be assessed after accomplishing the task and experiencing achievement. This activity requires formative assessment, according to which learners' performance and achievements are evaluated.

To conclude, when applying the CLT method and focusing on developing students` language skills, one of the most important things is to use the proper technique, which can help to achieve a goal. We can create equity and equality in the classrooms by choosing the right tool and considering each learner's needs. Using authentic materials can help learners connect the learning process to real life, which serves to ease the process of learning and receive beneficial wash-back.

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