Target Language Use

ACTFL Strategies for Target Language Input and Production

- Read the full text from ACTFL [here.](#)

  ACTFL recommends that learning take place through the target language for 90% or more of classroom time, except in immersion program models where the target language is used exclusively. The goal is to provide immersion in the target language unless there is a specific reason to NOT use the target language.

  Learners can only acquire (internalize) language when they hear large quantities of oral input that is interesting, a little beyond learners' current level of competence **(i + 1)**, and not grammatically sequenced (Krashen,1982).

    - Note that the "**i**" refers to the current competence of the learner and the **+1** represents the next level of competence beyond where the learner is currently.

- Learners acquire language through meaning-making with others, like solving a puzzle (Vygotsky, 1986).

- When learners hear large amounts of comprehensible input and are engaged in meaning-making, they understand and retain what they hear and they use it to form their own messages (Long, 1981; Swain, 1995).

- Use of the target language must be accompanied by a variety of strategies to facilitate comprehension and support meaning-making. Comprehensible input and comprehensible output go hand-in-hand.

- Strategies that support using the target language in an immersive environment include:
    - Provide a language-rich environment.
    - Support comprehension and production through context/gestures/visual support.
    - Focus on meaning before details.
    - Conduct comprehension checks to ensure understanding.
    - Negotiate meaning with learners and encourage negotiation among learners.
    - Elicit talk that increases in fluency, accuracy and complexity over time.
    - Encourage self-expression and spontaneous use of language.
    - Teach learners strategies for requesting clarification and assistance when faced with comprehension difficulties.
    - Avoid using English (one's native language) as the default for checking on meaning or understanding.

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Stephen Krashen's Theory of Language Acquisition:

- Read the full text here.

- "Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding."

- "In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful."

- "Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules and does not require tedious drill."

- "The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that learners really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language but allow learners to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production."

- "The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction, and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example, knowledge of grammar rules. [The learning process] is used to correct deviations from 'normal' speech and to give a speech a more 'polished' appearance."

Leslie Grahn's Collection of Target Language Strategies

- Visit grahnforlang for resources, strategies, articles, presentations and minicourses on target language input and output.

Instructional Techniques

- Provide large amounts of meaningful input (reading, listening, viewing) before expecting output from learners (writing, speaking, signing):
  - Learners need to hear the language in order to speak the language.
  - Learners need to read the language in order to write the language.
  - Learners need to view the language in order to sign the language.

- Create an authentic need for the target language in the classroom, such as asking permission, borrowing items, communicating with a peer or collaborating on a project or activity.

- Establish consistency of at least 90% target language use by all teachers across all language levels.

- Gradually increase the teacher's use of the target language each day if the target language is not being used at least 90% of the time. This will ease the transition for the teacher and the learners.

- Find online articles or attend a workshop, webinar or conference session that offers strategies for staying in the target language.

- Practice ahead of time what to say or how to explain a complex concept or topic in the target language.

- Improve teacher language proficiency by:
  - taking in-person or online classes,
  - watching videos in the target language,
  - conversing in the target language with colleagues at school,
  - finding a live or virtual conversation partner, and
  - teaching a lower-level class until skills are strong enough to conduct an upper-level class in the target language.

Comprehensible Input of Language

Learners can only acquire (internalize) language when they hear large quantities of oral input that is interesting, a little beyond learners' current level of competence and not grammatically sequenced (Krashen, 1982).

- Provide language input at an [i + 1] level, where "i" refers to the current proficiency of the learner and "+1" represents the next level of proficiency beyond where the learner is currently. For example:
  - If Novice Low learners are easily able to understand single words, such as animals or family members, begin to add simple descriptions and actions to elaborate on the known words. This will help the learners move toward Novice Mid proficiency.
  - If Intermediate Mid learners are easily able to understand key information from connected sentences or short paragraphs, introduce texts or media in different time frames. This will help the learners move toward Intermediate High proficiency.

- Use visual cues to support input:
  - Use body cues such as gestures, facial expressions and whole-body language to make kinesthetic and visual connections to meaning.
  - Provide visuals and props as context or to establish routines.
  - Present material using realia, graphs, photos and multimedia presentations.
  - Model tasks and provide sample products for tasks or activities.
  - Use technology to help learners create their own mental image of input meaning.
  - Use graphic or advance organizers when presenting the material.

- Provide comprehensible language:
  - Use language that is clear, consistent and organized.
  - Use rephrasing and paraphrasing to assist with meaning.
  - Define words by example not by translation.
  - Slow the delivery of speech, but do not exaggerate sounds.
  - Use familiar structures and simplified sentences at lower proficiency levels.
  - Repeat keys words and phrases more than once and in different contexts.

- Use tone of voice to emphasize the key part or meaning of the message.
- Use written language to supplement oral or signed language.

- Provide a meaningful context for language input:
  - Activate background knowledge of the subject prior to an introduction by using an informal or online survey, asking preliminary questions about the topic, relating a prior concept to the new concept or drawing on learners' relevant experiences.
  - Ensure that learners know the purpose or outcome of the lesson.
  - Use graphic or advance organizers to give learners an outline or preview of what they will hear, read or view.

- Allow time for Free Voluntary Reading in the target language:
  - Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) allows time for learners to self-select reading materials from a classroom library of both authentic and learner-focused materials. Ideas for developing routines, expectations and materials for FVR are found here.
  - Studies in second language acquisition consistently report correlations between free reading and better development in literacy skills, language competence, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar (Krashen, 2004).

Communicative Interaction in the Target Language

Language acquisition and communicative ability develop naturally as a result of the target language input that learners experience.

- **Total Physical Response (TPR):** Learners demonstrate a physical response attached to language that they hear, view or read.

- **Story Telling:** Tell a common story that all learners know, such as childhood events, folktales or shared experiences. Learners can be given props to use to make up, act out or tell a story. Many approaches like TPRS Storytelling (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling), Movie Talk and Story-Listening provide teachers with tips, lessons and scripts for providing learners with the comprehensible input necessary to follow the story while activating all parts of the brain.

- **Re-telling:** Retell or have learners retell a shared story or experience, such as a sporting event, a TV show or a movie. Use learners' background knowledge to help create comprehensible input.

- **Shared Topic:** Choose a common topic, such as school subjects, friends, foods or events, which the teacher will talk about for a few minutes. Learners then will share information about the same topic, at whatever proficiency level they are able.

- **Multistory Construction:** Carol Gaab explains the relevance of teaching proficiency through reading, storytelling and personalized questions and answers to modern teaching, including classroom examples.

- **Personalized Questions and Answers:** Use personalized questions that are level-appropriate and are personally relevant to specific learners (or learner groups) and that revolve around a target language word, phrase or structure. The teacher uses questions to elicit an engaging conversation that will provide the context and repetition that language learners need as they begin the acquisition process.

References

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