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THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH IN CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Annotation:

The article reveals content-oriented learning, which is an important approach in language learning, designed to teach students a second language in content and language.

Key words: collaborative approach, integrated learning, second language learning, student-centered teaching.

Аннотация:

Статья раскрывает контентно-ориентированное обучение, которое является важным подходом в языковом образовании, предназначенным для обучения студентов второму языку по содержанию и языку

Ключевые слова: совместный подход, интегрированное обучение, изучение второго языка, обучение, ориентированное на студента.

There is no doubt that the introduction of computers has revolutionized second language teaching. The possibilities afforded by the use of the Internet or by exploiting the information on the World Wide Web, including the chance to use real texts or to communicate with people around the world, have brought new concepts to teaching. Furthermore, the development of technology tools, whether specifically for language learning or not, has resulted in fundamental

changes in classroom practices and brought with it new responsibilities for language teachers.

Students' expectations have also changed. Students now value their teachers more if they are reasonably competent users of technology, and if they incorporate in effective and enjoyable ways computer-mediated activities in their teaching materials and classes. Moreover, students have become accustomed to the ease and speed with which information can be accessed or messages transmitted and now expect online access to syllabus descriptions, assignments and materials for class work.

The main advantages of using technology for language learning are because it facilitates greater exposure to authentic language, access to a wide range of sources of information and to different varieties of language, opportunities for interaction and communication and greater learner participation.

The rapid accessibility of information via the World Wide Web is now something we take for granted, and, as computers and related technologies steadily become an integral part of many societies and education systems “ the possibilities for computer use in language learning settings are bounded only by the creativity and ingenuity of the designer or instructor.” Nevertheless, this does not mean that technology should be used for its own sake. There have to be sound pedagogical reasons for using technology in language learning contexts, and this requires knowing what technology to use and a high level of skill in choosing and designing language learning tasks. We should also bear in mind that the use of online materials does not necessarily involve engaging in a new form of teaching or learning.

The tools technology provides may facilitate learning or be somehow more motivating. This happens because they enhance accessibility and immediacy to the processes of learning, although these processes may not be different from those engaged in with paper-based materials. We would argue, in fact, that the majority of learning activities employed in computer-based teaching are, for the

most part, online versions of already existing activities with paper-based materials. To put it another way, unless the tools which technology provides are not used innovatively their use does not constitute, by itself, a groundbreaking new approach. The self-correction of exercises and online tutorials smooth the progress of language acquisition; nevertheless, the tasks proposed in online materials are based on the same approaches than written material.

Collaborative learning is a teaching approach, which enhances maturity, experience and social communication in an academic environment while discouraging passivity, repetition and individuality. In collaborative learning, students can develop their own learning strategies and select their own objectives. At the same time, they are responsible for what they learn and how they gain knowledge of a topic.

There are different motivations for incorporating collaborative approaches and different ways in which the teacher is present to assist language learning while the students collaborate in elaborating tasks. Under teacher guidance, the students make connections between previous knowledge and new information. They use language and technology as tools for learning and develop language and thinking competences.

Collaborative work should be well planned and teachers should design strategies that provide all the participants with clear roles in the different parts of the action research. There are two modalities to consider in the collaborative approach. On the one hand, teachers from different areas of knowledge collaborate in order to offer learning tools to students. On the other hand, students work collaboratively in the classroom to carry out the tasks proposed by the teacher. In both modalities, the roles of the teachers and students are different. In the first one, the teacher is central to the learning activity, facilitating the interdisciplinary tasks to the passive students. The teacher's role is more facilitative; to guide and channel the students in their learning. In the second, the teacher's role is less active, helping the students but not interfering

in the learning process. María Luisa Carrió Pastor and David Perry propose a third modality which combines these two, in which teachers and students collaborate in the design and evaluation of the teaching-learning activities, thereby taking into account individual and group needs of the students. Collaboration implies interaction among the different members of the group and the different proposals should act as webs of knowledge that combine to offer unique results. They focus on Collaborative Approach combined with the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach, which integrates the learning process of a second language and specific topics of content subjects. As the target language is the means of learning content, students tend to be highly motivated and language acquisition is integrated in the learning process. Content teachers and language teachers integrate their learning approaches in order to obtain a higher learning outcome from students. According to them Content and Language Integrated Learning should be taught as a single subject being based on close cooperation between content teachers and language teachers. Some researchers such as Wolf, 2007; Marsh, 2009 and others consider that the role of the language teacher is merely that of 'assistant' to the content teacher. María Luisa Carrió Pastor and David Perry think that both content and language are of equal importance and both the content and language teachers collaborate to produce specific materials, which allow different aspects to be focused on. Collaborative learning implies interactive learning and technology can facilitate communication and make the learning process more effective.

Online learning can generate a positive interdependency, can promote verbal exchange, can stimulate personal and group skills while giving due value to individual contributions. As such, it is ideally suited to collaborative and content-based activities: "The computer-as-a-tool agrees with the fact that today a number of educators are seeking ways to teach in more content-based approaches" (Soetaert & Bonamie, 2006: 5).

The material design follows the same format here: online tasks; follow up and vocabulary. Students can learn both the specialty and the language. They can learn relevant vocabulary to a lesser extent, grammar, within an authentic context; practice all major skills in this context: reading, writing, and also speaking and listening.

This learning favors a student-centered approach to pedagogy as well as collaborative projects, which were partly defined by students' interest. Both the materials and the classes are balanced between content and language tasks although the teachers do not teach together in class. Second language learning should be integrated in everyday activities and seen as part of the students' environment. Students should come to regard language as a practical tool used to communicate with people all around the world. When this communicative aspect is forgotten the practice of a second language can become restricted to sterile gap filling and other drills. In the information era, teachers need to adapt their materials and methodologies to better reflect the needs of students and to make use of the possibilities available.

Today, students prefer online activities to traditional ones, as they find the dynamic characteristics of the tasks more stimulating. Students have better chance for better understanding, improved writing and speaking as well. Self-esteem of the students can be reinforced and other skills also such as searching for information, learning independence, resourcefulness, etc. Students feel more confident about using a second language after the online activities, which, in a sense, force them to engage with the language and to continually evaluate what they need to do.

In conclusion, we can say that teaching approaches should be implemented to teach a second language and a dynamic tool such as the Internet should be used as a vehicle. Today, higher education students are used to technology and demand updated materials and teachers should take advantage of online

materials and communication tools. Designing teaching-learning materials collaboratively by content and language teachers will benefit in the following:

1. The integration of the content teacher and the language teacher to design the material, taking into account the needs of students and the possibilities of using authentic technical texts;
2. The development of collaborative work, students have to plan their learning material with teachers and colleagues;
3. It stimulates interpersonal communication through group activities;
4. It is challenging and motivating, students are required to learn content and language;
5. The incorporation of technology allows contributions of different kinds from students as well as providing them with different forms of learning.

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