

PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

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ABSTRACT: This article studies the progress of teaching foreign languages in different age groups and the role of different teaching principles in this process, as well as problems that learners come across in communication and speaking practice and appropriate solutions for them.

Keywords: Principle, age groups, teaching foreign languages, conscious approach, principle of activity, principle of visualization.

INTRODUCTION

In developing a set of principles to guide the course of teaching, it is first necessary to understand the meaning of principle. The term principle has been adopted from the Latin word *principles*, which means the beginning or the end of all things. The early Greeks used the term *principles* not only to express the origin of things but also to express their fundamental laws, and to put out their ultimate objectives. Sometimes the sources or causes from which things precede, as for instance the visible universe, are called *principles*, so also are the characteristics of things, or whatever determine their nature.

METHODS

Principles are used in many different senses. According to Webster, principle is a comprehensive law or doctrine, from which others are derived, or on which others are founded.

To Ayer, the term principle is most frequently used, to signify a generalized statement through which otherwise unrelated data are systematized and interpreted.

In the language of Hopkins, “a principle is a rule for guiding the ship of education so that it will reach the port designated by the philosophy of education; it is a compass by which the path of education is directed.”

Generally the term is often used to mean any kind of general truth or guiding norm by which a process is carried on, as when we speak mathematical principles.

To the extent that principle is accepted as a fundamental truth, it may be considered a comprehensive law, a doctrine, a policy, or a deep-seated belief which governs the conduct of various types of human endeavor.

The term may also refer to the psychological laws of learning, to important educational concepts or theories, to the statements of facts, to governing laws or rules of conduct, and to generally accepted tenets.

As usual in educational practice, the term principle is not thought of as a rule but rather as a fundamental truth regarding the relationship of factors with which the teacher and the pupil deal.

Principles are the chief guides to make teaching and learning intelligent and productive.

Methods of foreign language teaching are based on the fundamental principles of didactics; among them, a conscious approach to language learning, activity, visualization, and others. However, in foreign language teaching, due to the specific features of the subject in which means and ends are equally essential, these principles are used in a particular way. There are three principal views at this level:

The structural view treats language as a system of structurally related elements to code meaning (e.g. grammar).

The functional view sees language as a vehicle to express or accomplish a certain function, such as requesting something.

The interactive view sees language as a vehicle for the creation and maintenance of social relations, focusing on patterns of moves, acts, negotiation and interaction found in conversational exchanges. This view has been fairly dominant since the 1980s.

The principle of conscious approach to language learning implies comprehension of a linguistic phenomenon of language material by the pupil usually through the medium of the native language, or the arrangement of the material in sentence patterns graded in difficulties with the emphasis on some elements which are singled out as — teaching points. In all cases pupils understand both the form and the content of the material they are to learn, and they are aware of how they should treat the material while performing various exercises which aim at developing habits and skills in using it. Such an approach to language learning usually contrasts with — mechanical learning through repetitive drill. V. A. Artemov, a prominent psychologist, puts forward a theory of the unity of the language rule and the speech activity (language behaviour) in foreign language teaching. In teaching a foreign language therefore, it is more reasonable to help pupils in assimilating language rules which function in this language by introducing the rules, rather than to wait until the learners deduce these rules through speech activity.

In connection with the analysis of the principle of conscious teaching, it is necessary to dwell upon the forming of habits and skills in a foreign language. Language habits and skills are extremely complex in their nature and are closely connected with conscious activity of students. Consequently, a habit may be considered to be a dialectical unity of automatism and consciousness. The psychological basis of habits is conscious associations; their physiological basis is temporary nerve connections, conditioned reflexes, arising as a result of reciprocal actions of first and second signaling system. The principle of activity in foreign language teaching is of

utmost importance since learning a foreign language should result in mastering the target language which is possible provided the pupil is an active participant in the process, he is involved in language activities throughout the whole course of instruction. In modern psychology activity is now generally considered to be a main characteristic of cognitive processes. Activity arises under certain conditions. The main sources of activity are motivation, desire, and interest. In teaching a foreign language it is necessary to stimulate pupils' activity by involving them in the act of communication in the target language either in its oral (hearing, speaking) or written (reading, writing) form.

The principle of visualization has always been very important for language learning since the gaining of knowledge begins either with sense perception or with what has been formerly perceived, that is, with previous experience. Visualization, as it is understood here, may be defined as specially organized demonstration of linguistic material and language behavior characteristic of the target language with the purpose of helping the pupil in understanding, assimilating, and utilizing this in connection with the task set. Since pupils acquire a second language in artificial conditions and not in real life, as is the case when children assimilate their mother tongue, visualization should be extensively used in foreign language teaching.

Through visual presentation of the material and the pupils' observation of language behavior of native speakers they acquire the necessary habits and skills in spoken language, namely, in intonation, word usage, and grammar. Visualization allows the teacher to create natural conditions for pupils' oral practice and —free conversation.

RESULTS

Methodologists and teachers are searching for ways to solve this problem. Some ways may be recommended. They are as follows: - work in unison, when pupils are told to pronounce a sound, a word, a phrase, a sentence, or to read something out loud in chorus in imitation of the teacher, or a speaker if a tape-recorder is used; - mass work, when pupils are invited to listen to a text, to read a text silently, to do some exercises in written form, in other words, when they learn for themselves, and each does the same work as his classmates; - work in small groups when pupils are divided into four- five groups, and each group receives a special assignment either for reading or speaking; the work results in conversation between group 1 and the class, group 2 and the class, etc.;

- work in pairs, when pupils sitting at the same desk have an opportunity to talk in the target language: reciting a dialogue they are to learn, doing an ask-and-answer exercise or making up a dialogue of their own;

- individual work in programmed instruction, when each pupil can work with the program he receives either through visual or auditory perception at his own pace.

DISCUSSION

Many conventional assumptions about differences between children and adults in language learning may turn out, when subjected to careful examination or research to be not quite so obvious or inevitably true as they seem. Younger children learn languages better than older ones; children learn better than adults.

1. Foreign language learning in school should be started at as early an age as possible.
2. Children and adults learn languages basically the same way.
3. Adults have a longer concentration span than children.
4. It is easier to interest and motivate children than adults.

The truth of the assumption that young children learn better is even more dubious if applied to formal classroom learning: here there is only one teacher to a number of children, exposure time is very limited, and the 'survival' motive does not usually apply. Moreover, young children have not as yet developed the cognitive skills and self-discipline that enable them to make the most of limited teacher-mediated information; they rely more on intuitive acquisition, which in its turn relies on a larger volume of comprehensible input than there is time for in lessons. Some people have argued for the existence of a 'critical period' in language learning: if you get too old and pass this period you will have significantly more difficulty learning; thus early learning in schools would seem essential. But this theory is not conclusively supported by research evidence: there may not be a critical period at all; or there may be several (Singleton, 1989; Long, 1990). [1] The research-supported hypothesis discussed above — that children may actually become more effective language learners as they get older, particularly in formal teacher-mediated learning situations - means that the investment of lesson time at an early age may not be cost-effective. In other words, if you have a limited number of hours to give to foreign language teaching in school, it will probably be more rewarding in terms of sheer amount of learning to invest these in the older classes. We have heard one authority on the subject, C. Snow [2] in a lecture 'Using LI skills for L2 proficiency:

Why older L2 learners are better', at the Conference of the English Teachers' Association of Israel, Jerusalem, 1993) claim that twelve is the optimum age for starting a foreign language in school; my own experience is that ten is about right. Teachers commonly notice that they cannot get children to concentrate on certain learning activities as long as they can get adults to do so. However, the problem is not the concentration span itself - children will spend hours absorbed in activities that really interest them - but rather the ability of the individual to persevere with something of no immediate intrinsic interest to them. I love older learners do exhibit noticeable superiority, because they tend to be more self-disciplined. One implication for teaching is the need to devote a lot of thought to the (intrinsic) interest

value of learning activities for younger learners. Hence the methodological principle may be formulated as follows: In teaching a foreign language at schools it is necessary to follow the oral approach as it is the one that allows the pupil to deal with the language in its primary function — as a means of communication.

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