

Collaborative Models for Teaching Oral and Reading Proficiency

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*Current research on second language acquisition says that one major priority is to address the frustration and anxiety levels that many students experience in the foreign language classroom. Foreign language teachers are aware of the "many learners" who... "come to language classes with raised inhibitions and fears that prevent them taking the necessary risks that learners must take in order to try out language and receive constructive feedback." (Brown, *Principles of Language Learning*.)*

Incorporating collaborative activities plays an important role in decreasing the negative influence of stress and in helping students to be successful language learners. It has been shown that collaboration decentralizes the role of the teacher, allows students to interact with each other and to become active in an environment and structure of their own creation. At the recent Georgia Conference on University and College Teaching, the two models of collaboration presented featured new approaches proven successful in building self-confidence while increasing the students' oral and reading proficiency.

The oral proficiency model entitled, "Parlez-vous-francais: The Cocktail Party as an Interactive Communicative Activity" was a video presentation of students practicing their oral skills outside of the classroom in a unique situation of collaboration. The oral exercise involves a collaborative team of faculty, staff, and students. Kennesaw State College's willing, diverse French-speaking community makes it possible for students to practice their skills in an authentic atmosphere. Students sip their punch at the cocktail party and circulate among the French-speaking faculty in the Department of Foreign Languages and in other disciplines: in Political Science, Michele Zebich-Knos; in Art, Susan Bakewell; in History, Lovette Elango; in the Library, Dewi Wilson; in Mathematics, Phillipe Laval, native speakers of French in the student population, and French majors.

The cocktail party is the final aural-oral test of the quarter for students at the beginning and intermediate level. Students earn twenty-five points by talking to five people and getting their signatures (students sometimes receive an evaluative comment) on a five by six card. Students in the beginning courses are more inhibited than the intermediates at first, but based on the following evaluation of a 102 student, the sociable nature of the event, and the freedom it provides in letting the student take risks eradicate to a large degree their uneasiness. "Several of my friends knew of my anxiety going into Thursday and called me later that day to see how it went. They were very surprised to hear me speaking ecstatically about the whole experience. The cocktail party has convinced me to take other French courses."

The emphasis that the cocktail party places on cooperative teaching and learning and practicing oral communication skills should

enable students to reach what research shows to be their primary goal. "Many language students consider speaking ability one of their primary goals of study, either because they would derive some personal satisfaction from being able to speak a second language or because they feel it would be useful in pursuing other interests or career goals." (Omaggio, *Language Learning in Context*).

While the primary goal of students is to speak the target language, it is clear that development of other skills in the target language is essential if the level of oral production is to improve. It is with this concern in mind that a collaborative model for reading was developed. The reading proficiency model entitled "You Know More Than You Think You Know: A Collaborative Model for Reading in Spanish," was an activity designed to encourage students to approach reading as an active process between the reader and the text and between students. Hopefully this approach will demonstrate more clearly to students how to be "top-down" readers rather than "bottom-up" readers. "Bottom up" readers tend to look up every word and have high levels of frustration. "Top-down" readers look for clues in the reading to help them discover meaning without relying excessively on dictionaries. Such readers are more likely to want to continue to read.

The reading activity is divided into three stages. The tools necessary for the activity are transparencies, transparency pens, and a reading document that is totally authentic in form and presentation. The first stage of the activity is devoted to a search of cognates in the reading. Students are divided into groups of two or three, given a transparency page and pen, and asked to place the cognates on the page in the exact location that they are found in the reading. The placement of the cognates is important to ensure that students understand the importance of the contextualized meaning of the word. Students who focus only on the cognate, and not on the cognate and its location, are not developing good "top down" reading strategies.

The same process is followed with stage two and three of the activity. In stage two students are encouraged to discuss and then place words that they recognize from their own previous exposure to the language. In stage three students are allowed to use the dictionary to look up the meaning for two or three words in the document. Thus this activity tries to discourage excessive dictionary use and demonstrates to the students that they are able to obtain a significant amount of information from a document without looking up every word.

The two models described are part of an on-going process to provide innovative activities and to contribute to the research on the acquisition of a second language. Student responses to these models affirm the value of collaborative activities for reduction of stress. •