

INTRODUCTION

The proposals of the National Program of the Textbook (PNLD- Programa Nacional do Livro Didático) and the Curriculum Guidelines (Orientações Curriculares) emphasize that teaching a foreign language must be related not only in terms of linguistics aspects but it must enable students to have access to other cultural productions and recognize relevant social issues that are important during the process of building identity. Being in contact with different forms to see and organize the world helps learners to create a wider perspective of other values that may differ from their own.

Lessons in an English textbook must contain contextualized and significant themes to engage students in a deeper reflection about social, political and cultural diversity, avoiding any kind of prejudice and stereotype. Units 1 and 2 introduce environmental issues and personal description as main topics. The aim of both units is to encourage students to discuss about important subjects on their everyday life.

It is essential to introduce authentic and original material that may include a range of different text genre and also multimodality. All texts and videos in the units were taken from websites and introduce real-life situations and English native speakers' speeches. Units may present pre and post reading activities that requires several strategies such as location of explicit information, global/detailed comprehension and production of inferences and hypothesis as well. The texts must explore reflection and critical thinking, avoiding its use to functional and grammar purposes only. Unit 1 intends to provoke discussions about how our attitudes may cause significant changes in our planet.

Development of writing skills takes into account the conditions of production. It is necessary to analyze who is writing to whom, specific purpose and arguments used. This interactive process demands constant reformulation and attention to coherence and cohesion. It is also relevant to reflect about rules and syntactic conventions.

Authentic material must be used in listening activities, introducing diversity in accents. It must stimulate intensive listening (sounds and words), extensive (global comprehension) and selective (specific information). The evaluation part in unit 1 aims to let students be in contact with British accent during the video part and the telling story exercise.

Oral production must be significant to students, enable them to communicate in real life situations and present the variety of language functions, considering the appropriate use in every context. Pronunciation is also an important element to achieve a more natural speech and to be comprehensible.

All the skills must be integrated through a communicative approach and include grammar and vocabulary as vehicles to produce meaning and not only structure. Lessons may allow learners to interact and communicate through negotiation, considering different forms of expressions and ability to use appropriate language. Teachers must also consider that students see the world and make meaning through other different and multiple forms of expression (image, gesture, attitudes and hypertext).

READING

Reading and writing are connected since they are part of the same whole. They must be taught integrally to increase comprehension and not as independent subjects. Writers and readers are involved in the texts at the same time they interpret and construct meaning, which is the main goal.

There is a relationship between writer and reader. The first expects the reader to react to the text and its assumptions. Even if the reader's point of view does not match with the writer's, use of inference leads to a clear understanding of the text. The value of sentences arises from their relationship to other sentences. If the text is well organized and the paragraphs show an organization principle so even a difficult text (it depends on the student level of proficiency) and other factors as described below can lead learners to understand how ideas hang together.

In reading process teachers may help students to develop some skills to understand the value of a text and "not only the meanings of individual sentences in a text, but also the way they combine with other sentences, and with unstated but implied meanings, to produce a coherent message" (NUTTAL, 2000,p.100). It is necessary to develop skills such as recognition of functional value of sentences, text organization, presuppositions, inferences and predictions. After understanding the text as a whole the reader will be able to evaluate, appreciate and apply information.

Readers recognize functional value through discourse markers (however, in conclusion, etc) or inferences. Functions can be independent (the sentence is clear even without a context), text-dependent (there is a relationship among sentences) or interaction-dependent (relationship between writer and reader). Practice must be with authentic texts since the value of a sentence is based on how it is related to other sentences. Ideally when there is doubt about the value of a sentence from a chosen text there is room for discussion.

It is possible to help readers to understand some difficult sentences if they are able to analyze how the text is organized. The identification of some patterns through the text is a tool to stimulate critical thinking. It is easier to begin with paragraph organization rather than deal with sentence level. Text diagrams may be used to train this skill.

In other situations some sentences are not clearly connected. The writer expects readers to understand them by previous experience/knowledge (schemata) and also assumes or presupposes readers will be able to comprehend and share views that are expressed. The way readers interpret depends on how schemata are activated by the text. Appropriate interpretation also depends whether readers' schemata are similar to writers'.

Inference is another important aspect on understanding someone's thought on a text. Common sense, knowledge of the world and schemata may lead to a possible right conclusion of what the writer expected from the reader. It is impossible, though, to define how much of inference was enough. Unit 2 is designed to fifth grade, basic level. Although students may not have a great amount of vocabulary to understand the whole text, it is the teacher's role to help them realize it is not necessary to know all the words, but the connection between them can lead to a satisfactory comprehension of what is written.

As people tend to think similar things it is clear that predictions are useful to point some expectations of text content. It does not mean the speculation will be right. It is not possible to assume only one possible interpretation of a text. It is necessary to accept that some other ways of comprehension are possible (poetry, for instance). Students may see different points from the teacher. If inappropriate interpretation happened due to ignorance, then it is the teachers' role to eliminate it through explanation. However it is necessary to analyze if the readers' point of view differs from the writer. Wrong predictions provoke good discussions on why the reader expected different things and some answers may rise through enriching analysis.

Readers must be skillful in bottom-up and top-down strategies, which are complementary ways of processing a text. The first deals with an overview of the whole text in which readers employ their assumptions (previewing and predicting) and background knowledge (cultural, linguistic and historical) then read to confirm previous expectations. The reader tries to predict the writer's purpose and what comes next. The second is related to construction of meaning through small units to appropriate understanding (words, sentences, longer texts). Readers work out sentence structure, developing a detailed comprehension of a limited area. Reading requires students to use strategies simultaneously to comprehend the text since both approaches complement each other. This skill leads to interactive reading which is the capacity of shifting from one strategy to another to check the sense of a text.

All skills lead to a more critical stage. If the reader is capable of recognizing a text as a whole and define some important aspects of its organization and its relation to external elements, then she/he will be able to evaluate and apply new information acquired. Reading and thinking skills distinguish facts from opinions, important points from details, causes from effects, etc. Readers may use their skills to deal with different characteristics in different texts.

Questions are good tools that teachers may use to help students during the process of comprehension. Through this way it is possible to access what the readers have in mind. Well-planned questions allow students to clarify some points that may be difficult for them. It is also important to demonstrate that such questions are opportunities to develop understanding and teachers must encourage students to improve their critical thinking.

“It is also possible to classify questions according to the skills they require from the reader; for the reading teacher, this is much more important than their grammatical form” (Nuttal, 2000, p.187). One type is related to literal comprehension and specific information. This perspective can be called “lack of horizon” (Marcuschi, 1996, tradução nossa)¹. It requires simple repetition and copy of objective information.

It is necessary to make readers aware of the text as a whole. Some questions lead to reorganization and reinterpretation of literal information. At this level, students are dealing with “minimum horizon”². There are few new elements but the reader makes small interference. The perspective of “maximum horizon”³ deals with questions of inference. Students may apply personal knowledge and external aspects of life connecting them with the text. Those questions explore intellectual skills so readers are expected to consider implied elements. Students must analyze explicit pieces of information from the text together in order to come up with adequate comprehension. Questions of evaluation (Nuttal, 2000, p.188) are also considered. These questions give students opportunity to judge the writer’s intention, whether he/she achieved it successfully and also if the reader has been influenced.

Marcuschi also points out the perspective of “problematic horizon” when comprehension goes beyond the text. Questions of personal response, based on adequate understanding, involve writer and reader. It is the student’s reaction about the text. There are questions involving the writers` process on what strategies were used to present what they mean. It is expected from the student to think about the process of organization of ideas, that is, if the

¹ Falta de horizonte; ² Horizonte mínimo; ³ Horizonte máximo

writer followed adequate steps to justify and use appropriate arguments. Those kind of questions, according to Nuttal, are directed to certain skills “since they force the readers to think not just about what the writer has written, but how and why she has written it, thus equipping themselves to tackle further and more difficult texts”(p. 189).

Another important aspect that must be taken into account is critical literacy (CL) which is a practice that focuses on relationship between language and identity, social and intercultural issues. Communicative approach allows learners to perform tasks that enable them to think more independently and CL has brought a wider perspective of language that involves knowledge and power. Language is never neutral. It is always biased and its structures change according to different contexts. CL educational practice aims to enable learners to go beyond linguistic aspects and think critically considering a range of realities. Content in CL is selected to be part of students` environment and represents real issues faced by learners, being significant to them. Critical literacy proposes a deeper analysis in reading based on questioning and reflection.

WRITING

Development of writing skills requires attention to four main steps: planning, drafting, revising and editing. Those stages are not always sequential and indeed some good writers tend to deal with one stage before and after another one (more planning while drafting, for example). An effective writing process approach leads students to a final written product through instructions that may affect performance. A program must teach students problem-solving skills at each stage so that learners will be able to set their goals at every step of a composition. Teachers may plan classes in which students can be in contact with different experiences to understand the nature of writing.

“Process writing in the classroom is highly structured as it necessitates the orderly teaching of process skills” (SEOW, 2002, p.316) so, initially, it is important not to allow free variation in the sequence of stages.

Planning stage involves pre-writing activities that encourages learners to write about the topic through some strategies. Group brainstorming, for example, is a strategy in which the whole class talks about ideas related to the topic. It is important to record everything written in case of double checking. In the first moment students are asked to let their minds free. At this time random lists (rapid free writing) or connection between words and phrases related

to the topic (clustering) may help writers to limit the subject. For argumentative or informative texts questions and answers may be a technique to define what need to be discussed in the text. All these activities help students to feel confident and motivated during pre-writing process since they have many possibilities to gather information.

While drafting students must organize all information gathered before and think about fluency of writing. Grammar accuracy is not the main goal at this stage. The focus must be on important points such as content/topic (discourse), text genre (format), audience/reader and destination. "A conscious sense of audience can dictate a certain style to be used" (SEOW, 2002, p.317) and encourages students to write statements that draws readers` attention. After this stage teachers can give specific oral or written responses as helpful suggestions before editing stage. Then students revise their texts based on teacher`s comments and check if the general content is clear enough and well organized. The writing part in unit 1 requires students to select to what information is important enough to draw people`s attention. In unit 2 learners are encouraged to talk about their family and themselves. This proposal makes their work more significant and meaningful to them.

The editing is a moment to revise the text for improvement. It is time to identify problems and correct them. The work can be peer-edited to help classmates to detect some errors involving verb tense, use of preposition, articles, pronouns and punctuation. This final check must consider content (relevant information and purpose), organization (introduction, development and conclusion) and language use (cohesion and coherence).

In evaluating writing, students must know in advance the criteria to final grade, so it is possible to check the main points and recognize weakness within the text. While correcting the final product, teachers should indicate the nature of errors in which a list of correction symbols, for example, can be a useful tool for students to identify and correct what is indicated. Instructors must also praise strong points and criticize weak constructions if necessary, giving some advice to improve them. After a feedback it is important to let students rewrite their texts as an opportunity to improve their first version. All this writing process must be meaningful to students. They need to recognize a real purpose on writing. Peer-editing is part of a strategy to encourage students to write texts considering content, organization of ideas and language use. Publishing, reading aloud, displaying on notice-boards are some important means of making students realize the importance and purpose of their writing and recognize that is worth doing.

LISTENING

Different from writing, listening is a receptive skill so it is not possible for teachers to observe directly neither the process nor the product of it. The theme of the lesson may be a clue of what students can expect from the audio part. Teachers can help learners asking them some questions and prepare for what comes next and what is expected from them. A real-life listening situation in videos may offer some extra clues such as characters' eye direction, body language and proximity for instance. Unit 1 and 2 introduce a video in which students may identify some words and expressions through the characters' behavior.

Various kinds of tasks must be presented in classroom to help students to identify informal and formal types. Students may also notice that colloquial and spontaneous conversations may affect grammar, vocabulary and syntax. It is also essential to practice and recognize differences between phonemes in the target language and mother tongue. Some sounds may not exist in L1 so students have to struggle to understand some sounds. If learners are familiar with such subject then it may be easier for them to hear correctly.

A great number of micro and macroskills involves listening performance. The former concerns bottom-up process and small chunks and bits of language. It includes recognition of word stress, reduced forms and grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs) and systems (tense, agreement). The latter deals with top-down strategy and focus on larger elements of the listening task including inferences, predictions, deductions, distinction of literal and implied meanings.

"Listening is not simply a linear process of recording strings of language as they are transmitted into our brains" (BROWN, 2004, p.122). Some aspects make listening difficult such as clustering (chunks), redundancy (unrehearsed spoken language, repetition), reduced forms (not previously learned), performance variables (natural speech), colloquial language (slangs, idioms), rate of delivery (speed of speaker), interaction (flow of language) and stress, rhythm and intonation.

SPEAKING

Performance of oral skills can be observable and "one of the biggest challenges to current language teaching methodology is to find effective ways of preparing students for spontaneous communication" (Dorney, Thurrel, 1994, p.40).

There are two approaches to teaching English: the indirect and the direct approach. The

former deals with tasks such problem-solving and role-plays because conversational competence is seen as interaction among learners. The latter involves specific microskills and strategies that must be in a conversation program and aims to make students aware of conversational rules. It also involves determined language input that may include fixed expressions that are frequently used in natural conversation.

It is necessary to develop learners' skills not to fail even if they know a great amount of grammar and vocabulary. There are social rules based on cultural conventions that must be respected to allow real communication. Those conversational structures involves how to start a conversation (openings), turn-takings, interrupting, how to change or stop talking about a subject (topic-shift), how to invite, accept or refuse something (adjacency pairs) and how to close a conversation without being rude.

Some strategies must also be highlighted to avoid communication trouble. The most important are message adjustments, paraphrase (explain object or action), approximation (use of alternative terms), asking for help, repetition or clarification, interpretive summary (reformulate someone's speech), checking and use of fillers/hesitation devices.

Specific contextual factors significantly influence language. Someone's office (duty) and status (social position) determine how the person talks. Diverse social events require different behavior. Natural and casual speech allows informal style whereas a careful attention to production may be more appropriate to formal settings. In both cases speaker must measure the degree of politeness to make the listener comfortable. Cross-cultural aspects may be seen difficult to some students and "what teachers need to do is a sort of cultural needs analysis to select the relevant norms, conventions and rules to be taught to their particular group of learners" (Dornel, Thrurrel, 1994, p.47). Those are some essential elements that a non native speaker must be aware to avoid misunderstandings and keep interaction organized.

A conversation program can be planned to give students communicative tasks in which there is a specific purpose. It is essential to introduce new material, avoiding long lists, and recycle what learners are already familiar with. All the strategies and rules are interrelated and it is the teachers' role to adapt a guideline to the need and level of their group. The exercises in the units that aim to develop oral skills encourage students to talk about what they face in their everyday life. Unit 1 discusses environmental problems and unit 2 helps learners to describe themselves and their favorite characters.

When learners aim to study a foreign language they are exposed to a range of linguistics variability. Differences in pronunciation occur in any language. They are based on

geographic region, age, gender, status and some other issues. It is easier to notice them in mother tongue, but when it comes to English it may be harder to identify variations.

Some students dream about speaking English as a native speaker, without foreign accent. Linguistic use must be considered since this knowledge can be recognized in mother language, but it is hard to be completely acquired in a foreign language. However learners can improve their skills and refine their accent through awareness of different sounds in English since the beginning of studies. Teaching pronunciation may consider specific issues, not global. Mother tongue interferes directly in a foreign language learning process. If students are familiar with English sounds there is a high probability for them to be more accurate.

GRAMMAR

When it comes to grammar there are two models that may be pointed out that are declarative knowledge (DK) and procedural knowledge (PK). The first relates to knowledge about form and it is a laborious process since students consciously apply grammar rules. With time the declarative turns to procedural knowledge that is the natural use of language.

The role of DK or PK depends on the tasks. In writing tasks DK may be more important since it is necessary to grammar rules correctly and in this case speed of production is not required. On the other hand PK may be important in “spontaneous conversation where immediate access to knowledge is required” (JOHNSON, 1994 P.122). Still declarative knowledge is important since knowledge about language is the first step to know how to use it.

Both DK and PK are important to learners. The teachers’ role is to find the best ways to present them to students. It is possible that, with time, declarative knowledge may disappear when procedural knowledge is developed. On the other hand when the process moves from PK to DK maybe DK will be achieved through a more difficult way. Once productions formed are wrong students may find difficult to change them. Teaching grammar must not require a focus on form or structure alone.

There are two possible manners to present grammar: inductively and deductively. The former is one in which students infer the rules from examples and the latter is one in which rules are given and learners must apply them to exercises. The main goal of teaching a foreign language is interaction and not only knowledge of the rules themselves. Thus teaching

grammar in a communicative and inductive way, moves language learning from use to production and focused on meaning. Both units in this work aim to introduce grammar through inductive way and make students realize the rules themselves without explicit explanation.

The use of explicit rules may be irrelevant since it is possible to teach grammar without stating explicit explanation of structure. On the other hand some learners require rules depending on their cognitive style.

“Teaching grammar means enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully and appropriately” (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2000, p.280). To meet this definition and have a wider understanding of language communication teachers may know three dimensions: form (visible units), semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (purpose). It may not be possible to analyze the three at the same time in a single lesson. However, the notion of those dimensions is worth understanding to recognize what there is to teach. The system is dynamic and integrates the dimensions, making them influence each other. It is impossible to separate them, but, for pedagogical reasons, teachers can focus students` attention to one aspect at a time.

Teaching form requires identification of specific points to be acquired. Students must receive feedback on their accuracy during practice-based exercises. When teaching meaning, pictures and realia may be helpful tools. Actions, commands and mime made by students are also useful to salient that dimension. When it comes to pragmatics dimension it is necessary to choose the appropriate structure to fit the context and social conditions. Role-play is an example of meaningful activity when teacher proposes a situation and ask students to solve problems. In the communicative phase errors may be accepted not to break the flow of interaction and correction should be postponed to practice phase.

It is the teachers` role to combine both presentations to a better result. Inductive approach requires introduction of language samples and students must be encouraged to make their own observations. One advantage is that teachers are able to assess students about what they already know then make any necessary modification.

COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

An efficient communicator is someone who involves the situation and the hearer, not only the language structures. Notions of three dimensions allows a better class planning to make

students find some strategies to communicate in real situations, considering what kind of language (form and meaning) is appropriate depending on the context (pragmatics). In units 1 and 2 students are required to address their production to other classmates. Through this manner learners may know the clear purpose of their activity and also how to accomplish it in a better way.

Communicative approach presents a broader perspective on language. It considers teaching in terms of functions that are performed and not only in its structures (grammar and vocabulary). It deals with social meaning of language considering different circumstances in which students must be able to adapt their speech according to situational and social factors. For real communication it is necessary more than just linguistic competence. Both units in this work do not focus on grammar structure itself. Lessons are designed to help students to realize aspects of language by themselves through practice.

Since communication is a complex process, knowledge of language forms is not sufficient. The main goal must be to enable students to use different forms to perform different functions depending on the context, including their interlocutors. Language is communication so “learners need knowledge of forms and meanings and functions. However, they must also use this knowledge and take into consideration the social situation in order to convey their intended meanings appropriately” (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2000, p. 131).

Teachers are facilitators in classroom. Instructions must be given in the target language. Their role is to monitor students’ production and establish situations (role-plays, games, problem-solving tasks, etc) in which learners are engaged in communication. Even if their knowledge about language is incomplete, activities are part of the process to negotiate meaning. Learners may find strategies to be understood and expose their opinions. Errors may occur during fluency-based activities and teachers must highlight them in further accuracy-based activities later, not at the moment of communication.

For all the activities work on discourse level based on authentic material is preferable since learners will be in contact with real language. They also must feel they are doing things that are useful with the target language; there must be a purpose on their production.

To achieve success through communicative approach some basic principles must be followed. The four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) must be integrated and whenever possible, authentic material should be introduced and therefore authentic language. Directions must be given by the teacher in the target language. The emphasis of

activities must be on functions and errors are seen as part of natural development. Activities must be planned to maximize their production and to promote communication. Thus, pair or group work must be included in classroom since students have an instant feedback if they were really understood. If not, they may negotiate meaning and express their own ideas and opinions. Teachers must encourage students to think critically about what they read and how they write. Communicative competence also involves skill for using appropriate language forms. Language does not communicate ideas and values, it creates them instead.