

**Language Teacher Training
Programme (Assisi)
University of Portsmouth**



Introduction

The language teacher training programme

The main aim of this language teacher training programme (48 hours over 7 days) is to provide both trainees and more experienced language teachers with a better understanding of the interface between theory, research and practice in second language learning and teaching.

In the training an analysis of how the principles derived from theory and research can be applied to day-to-day language teaching issues is provided. The idea is to discuss and examine, among participant, an effective and evidence-based language teaching pedagogy.

The Modules

The training consists of four modules:

- 1) Second language acquisition
- 2) The role of input and interaction
- 3) The nature of language and the role of grammar instruction
- 4) The nature of communication and the role of tasks

Each module provides a better understanding of how theoretical views and empirical research in second language acquisition might have an impact in the way a language should be taught in the classroom.

MODULE 1

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: REAL WORLD APPLICATIONS

Aims of the module

The study of second language acquisition is the study of how learners come to create a new language system with often a limited exposure to the second language. It is the study of how they can make use of that system during comprehension and speech production. In a general sense, a second language (L2) refers to a language that it is acquired after the first language (L1) has been established in early childhood.

Researchers in SLA are mainly interested in exploring what are the processes and key factors involved in the acquisition of an L2. Research is often about learners and learning, however, their findings have implications for teachers and teaching.

Theory and research in SLA has emphasised the complexity of acquisition processes. How learners process language, how they intake it and accommodate it into the new language system, and how they access the information for speech production are key areas of research in SLA.

In this module the main implications of research and theories in second language acquisition for language teaching will be highlighted. Findings from research have provided a shift in the way we understand second language acquisition and the roles played by both teachers and students in the classroom.

The research is clear on how acquisition happens. So, understanding something about acquisition pushes the teacher to question the prevailing model of language instruction.

MODULE 2

THE ROLE OF INPUT AND INTERACTION

Aims of the module

Input does not have multiple meanings or uses when it comes to how learners create a mental representation of data. In fact, the definition of input is so narrow as to rule out what a lot of teachers, students, parents, principals, administrators, and others think is necessary for language learning. So what does input mean in the context of learning languages? Input is language that learners hear or see in a communicative context.

Instructors and materials should provide learners with level-appropriate input and interaction. The role of input often gets lip service in language teaching. So the main aim of this module is to get back to this principle and spell it out clearly!

During the module specific examples of how to provide effective input and interaction activities in the language classroom will be explored and discussed.

MODULE 3

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Aims of the module

The main aim of this module is to provide participants with a better understanding of the interface between theory, research and teaching in grammar instruction. During the module an analysis of how the principles derived from theory and research can be applied to day-to-day teaching of grammar in modern languages will be examined and discussed.

Language is too abstract and complex to teach and learn explicitly. Language should not be treated as a subject matter if the goal is communicative ability. This has profound consequences for how we organize language-teaching materials as well as how we approach the classroom.

The module will examine and discuss the nature of language highlighting the implications for language teaching.

One of the key issues in second language teaching concerns the role and practice of grammar instruction. Does grammar instruction make a difference? How do we teach grammar in the language classroom? Is there an effective technique to teach grammar that it is better than others? These are some of the questions that scholars, language instructors, and practitioners address in their attempt to find the most appropriate and effective way to teach grammar. While many scholars address some of these questions to develop a better understanding of how people learn grammar, language instructors are in search of the most effective way to approach the teaching of grammar in the language classroom

In this module we examine the role of grammar in second language learning and teaching. Research and Theory in grammar learning provides valuable information about how grammar is learnt and how different factors may impact on the effectiveness of different pedagogical interventions. These pedagogical interventions move from input (e.g. input enhancement, consciousness-raising tasks, structured input tasks) to output-based options (e.g. collaborative tasks, structured output tasks).

MODULE 4

THE ROLE OF TASKS AND THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

Aims of the module

In traditional instruction lesson objectives are reduced to completing a chapter in a book or covering a particular form, set of vocabulary or a grammatical structure. In many cases a lesson objective is equated with the learning and practice of a particular form. The lesson is structured around this form (e.g. complete the story with the right form, write one sentence for each of the drawings in the story...etc.). Very often instructors make use of Q/A to measure whether learners are able to use the information and knowledge gained during a lesson. Despite the attempt of the instructor to extract information, Q/A practice very often resolves in the following:

- Few learners participate
- Native speaker speaks a lot
- Roles for both instructor and learner are restricted
- Learner speaks very little
- Not much interaction and negotiation of meaning

Communication cannot be equated with questions and answers (Q/A) practice. Communication is the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning. We know that interaction promotes comprehension and comprehension promotes acquisition.

Tasks promote acquisition and provide a purpose for language use. A task can be used to achieve a specific lesson objective. Tasks (and not Exercises or Activities) should form the backbone of the curriculum. Again, language teaching is dominated by the present + practice + test model. One reason for this is that teachers don't understand what their options are, what is truly "communicative" in terms of activities in class, and how to alternatively assess. So, this principle is crucial for teachers to move toward contemporary language teaching. A definition and understanding of the nature of communication is also crucial for developing effective language tasks.