Contextual Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Overview

- Contextual factors effects on the process of language learning
- Relevant instructional strategies

Terminology to Know

- Contextual factor
- Cognitive
- Linguistic
- Affective factors
- Language distance
- Language status
I had fallen through the chasm between two languages. The Spanish had been beaten out of me in the early years of school and I didn’t learn English very well either. This was a predicament of many Chicanos. We could almost be called incommunicable.... Our expressive powers were strong and vibrant. If these could be nurtured, if language skills could be developed, we could break through any communication barrier. We needed to obtain victories in language built on an infrastructure of self-worth. But we were often defeated from the start” (219).

Contextual Factors Impacting Second Language Acquisition

Rodríguez’ description includes a number of key factors that affected his language learning. Re-read his excerpt and list them below:
1. Spanish had been beaten out of me
2.
3.
4.
5.
What Do You Think?

• How is it that some English learners acquire English more quickly than others?
• Which do you think is more important, motivation or peer pressure?
• Why are some English learners more likely to drop out? or become valedictorian?

Contextual Factors Impacting Second Language Acquisition

What factors do you think affect the academic success and language acquisition of our English learners? List as many as you can.

Factors that are characteristics of the learner
Factors that are characteristics of the language
Factors that are characteristics of the learning process
Contextual Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Factors that are characteristics of the learner
- Diverse needs
- Diverse goals
- Peer groups
- Role models
- Home support
- Motivation

Factors that are characteristics of the language
- Language distance
- Native language proficiency
- Knowledge of second language
- Dialect and register
- Language status
- Language attitudes

Factors that are characteristics of the learning process
- Learning styles
- Classroom interaction

Contextual Factors Impacting Second Language Acquisition

Suggested activity:
- Work in pairs or individually. Select a slip of paper that contains one of 14 contextual factors identified by Dr. Aída Walqui as impacting second language acquisition.
- Read over the description of this factor, discuss it with your partner, and come up with at least one example of this factor.
- Prepare to share with the whole group and teach the others about your item.
- You can access a copy of the entire article at: www.cal.org/resources/digest/0005contextual.html

MOTIVATION
INTERVIEW WITH SAL FLORES: HOW TO REACH DISAFFECTIONED STUDENTS

Classroom Interaction

- Language learning does not occur as a result of the transmission of facts about language or from a succession of rote memorization drills
- It results from opportunities for meaningful interaction with others in the target language
- Teachers need to move toward more richly interactive language use, such as that found in instructional conversations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and collaborative classroom work (Adger, Kalyanpur, Peterson, & Bridger, 1995)

Source: A. Walqui 2000

Instructional Strategies to Address Contextual Factors

- Tapping prior knowledge
- Building background
- Setting content and language objectives
- L-1 as a learning asset
- Preparing opportunities for interaction
- Checking for understanding
- Designing higher order thinking projects
Structured Interaction

- Traditional classrooms see the teacher doing most of the talking, and when students speak, it is one at a time.
- Cooperative learning structures give many students the opportunity to talk and practice language at the same time.
- Cooperative learning structures allow the teacher to observe, listen, check, and adjust instruction based on that input.

Checking for Understanding—“I taught it, but did they learn it?”

Checkpoints need to be planned to make sure students understand the material and the language being used.

Examples:
- In a law school lecture, the professor explained that a particular argument was a red herring. No one raised their hand to ask what he meant, but more than half the class was “in the dark.”
- In a second grade class, the teacher read, “the dinosaurs are gone for good.” Some students misunderstood the expression “gone for good,” which means extinct. They thought it meant it was a good thing the dinosaurs were gone.

### Checking for Understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Early Intermediate</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thumbs up/thumbs down. Not your hand please.</td>
<td>Either ____ or _____. Is this a ____ or a ____?</td>
<td>Either ____ or _____. Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain to your team in your language.</td>
<td>One word answer/short answer.</td>
<td>Compare/contrasted Sequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate. Show me. Point to the. Sort these objects.</td>
<td>Make a list. Steps in a sequence. Complete a sentence frame or template.</td>
<td>Describe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build. Draw a model of ____. Draw an icon to symbolize or represent.</td>
<td>Complete a graphic organizer.</td>
<td>Why, what, where, when, why, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checking for Understanding

Activity:
• Using the chart differentiated by proficiency levels, how you could check for understanding?