

The Challenge Approach: An Innovative Teaching and Learning Pathway

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Abstract

The Challenge Approach is an innovative methodology for teaching English as a Foreign Language. It was derived from the experience of the instructors in the Training Program for English Teachers in Elementary School (PROCAPRI, in Spanish), an outreach program of the Universidad Nacional. This approach sets a challenge for teaching and learning that stimulates practitioners to exert an extra effort, triggers development of creative skills for successful achievement of different kinds of knowledge, raises nonverbal communication skills to the relevant position that the other language skills hold, and fosters implementation of implicit and explicit techniques to suit individuals' multiple cognitive processes.

Key words: challenge approach, methodology, teaching and learning, foreign language, nonverbal communication, creativity, implicit and explicit techniques, assessment, language achievement

Resumen

La filosofía del reto es una metodología innovadora para la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, derivada de la experiencia de los extensionistas del Programa de Capacitación para Profesores de Inglés de I y II Ciclos (PROCAPRI), programa de extensión de la Universidad Nacional. Este enfoque propone un reto para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje que estimula a los practicantes a realizar un mayor esfuerzo, activa el desarrollo de las habilidades de creatividad para el logro exitoso de diferentes conocimientos, le da a la comunicación no verbal la misma relevancia que tienen las otras destrezas del idioma, y fomenta la implementación de técnicas implícitas y explícitas de enseñanza para favorecer los múltiples procesos cognitivos de los aprendientes.

Palabras claves: filosofía del reto, metodología, enseñanza y aprendizaje, idioma extranjero, comunicación no verbal, creatividad, técnicas implícitas y explícitas, evaluación, adquisición del idioma

Because of the importance of having bilingual citizens to support Costa Rica's, technological, educational and economic growth, in 1995 the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) gradually launched the English curriculum in primary schools. The goal was to prepare individuals, at an earlier age, for the acquisition of the foreign language (FL). However, at the time, there were no professionals specialized in the area of English teaching to children, a constraint detected by professors of the School of Literature and Language Sciences (ELCL in Spanish) of the Universidad Nacional (UNA). Due to the above situation, some professors of the ELCL proposed the creation of the Training Program for English Teachers in Elementary School¹ (PROCAPRI in Spanish). This program has been successful ever since its creation in 1996, due to the benefits it has yielded to its different parties.

More than three hundred primary school in-service English teachers from the Central Valley and communities from the farthest areas of the country (Upala, Ciudad Neily, Nicoya, etc.) have developed more skills in teaching the foreign language (FL) to children due to the PROCAPRI training workshops; consequently, these instructors' young learners are exposed to more efficient methodology. In addition, PROCAPRI has enabled the UNA to regain the opportunity to carry out research on the field of teaching English to children using the program participants' educational experiences. Finally, the ELCL and the Centre for Research and Teaching in Education² (CIDE in Spanish) of the UNA, have used the PROCAPRI's experiences as the grounding to design the Bachelor's Program in Teaching English for Primary School—offered to the community for the first time in 2002—and to create the emphasis on teaching English to children of the Master's in Second Languages and Cultures of the ELCL.

The success depicted in the above scenario regarding the PROCAPRI is due, in great part, to the development of the innovative teaching philosophy named *The Challenge Approach* (CHA), that was formulated by Nandayure Valenzuela Arce and adopted and nurtured by Gustavo Álvarez Martínez and Nuria Villalobos Ulate, all three teacher-trainers of the outreach program. In the following paragraphs we provide the rationale of this philosophy and evidence of its effectiveness to facilitate pupils' FL learning process. Epistemologic explanations are given for each principle of the CHA, some are followed by illustrations from real teaching/learning experiences, and in others, the examples are included in the theoretical justification.

The Challenge Approach

It is the challenge of accomplishment that motivates individuals to display the mental, emotional, and physical effort that the learning/teaching process requires; for this reason, challenge is the pillar of our teaching philosophy, so it is relevant to set its meaning in the educational context. Claire Kramersch says that challenge “is a test of strength...an opportunity to show what one can really do...it is an appeal to action...that requires hard work and perseverance...but it

is a feasible task...” (1993, p. 21). We agree with her, for based on our personal experience we have learned that challenge entails competing against one’s own constraints (personality, intelligence, psychology) and against those from the outside world (society, methodology, culture) in order to achieve and/or to have others achieve second language linguistic and communicative competence. For this reason, challenging ourselves was and is our standard as teachers of the target language. As educators, we have seen that students feel that it would be difficult (if not impossible) to understand a particular content, to cope with the demands set for an assignment, or to perform successfully on a test. Therefore, classes should be carefully planned to have students challenge themselves for day-to-day improvement. Some of them accept the challenge with joy, others go through a stage of rejection but then accept it, and very few decide not to work so hard, i.e., they do not accept the challenge.

Reflecting on our teaching experience, we became aware that although we have adopted teaching principles from Content Based Instruction (CBI), Task-Based Instruction (TBI), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Content Language Teaching (CLT), and other methodologies and approaches, we have also developed and implemented some of our own. This combination of borrowed principles with our own constitutes an effective teaching formula that we named the “Challenge Approach” (CHA). The eclectic philosophy helps foster positive attitudes and behaviors for FL students to approach the learning process successfully. The approaches mentioned above have guided us to carry out this process, and we have seen that the students learn more and better since, although the content-teacher focuses on teaching some specific linguistic elements, the pupils learn a myriad of additional grammar forms embedded implicitly in the socio-cultural content just by constant exposure to them.

CHA is the product of the learning gained from the constructive way in which we were taught to deal with English in the United States (USA) and in Costa Rica (CR). Becoming bilingual was the goal we intended to achieve in both settings, but learning and culture constraints jeopardized our success. We challenged ourselves to overcome these problems and found the strength to live up to the high demands that learning a second/foreign language implies in values such as hard-work, perseverance, ambition, and self-improvement. In addition, we used affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains to make the target language and culture meaningful and learnable.

Our experiences as learners and teachers and the acquired theoretical background on linguistics, formed a particular perspective that has led us to view the FL learning process as the personal challenges the students face and strive to meet in order to achieve their target language (TL) objectives. We have fostered this perspective in our classes and most of our students have achieved development in their language and culture skills as a result of it. In order to help other teachers understand what the CHA approach is about, how it can be implemented, and why it is effective, we describe below some of the most important principles that conform it; yet we remind educators that they must keep an open mind to be able to discard or include principles from other approaches to reformulate the CHA

when the specific situation of the students (age, language competence, interests, purposes for learning the TL, etc.) call for a change.

Principles of the Challenge Approach

The Role of Teachers and Students

In the Challenge Approach, the teachers' role is that of "good managers." Educators are responsible for providing suitable learning conditions to help students achieve progress in the TL, and encouraging positive attitudes and behavior that will enable them to take advantage of these conditions. The above is accomplished by diagnosing the learners' needs, setting clear language/culture objectives, selecting appropriate teaching principles, organizing all pedagogical elements, designing meaningful materials, creating interesting and communicative tasks, providing grouping variety (whole-class, individual, pairs, small groups), and including explicit as well as implicit teaching techniques. In addition, teachers must coordinate the learning process, maintain an environment of respect, and reorient negative behaviors with humanistic authority.

The role of the students is that of "challenge takers." Learners are responsible for their own progress since, in spite of having been provided with suitable conditions to learn, they are the ones who decide whether they are to take advantage of these conditions or not. In pursue of achieving learning objectives, students set their own challenges according to their language level and academic, social, and cognitive abilities. It implies a commitment with oneself to make one's best effort to accomplish learning tasks using all effective learning resources within one's reach; in other words, each student competes against his/her own constraints such as attitude, personality, learning style or aptitude.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Children

- Each group of primary school learners has its own culture. Mrs. Valenzuela noticed this in her first encounter with third-graders. At the beginning of the school year, when she entered the class, there were 25 children running, jumping, and screaming. Although she said good morning and headed to the front of the class, the students did not pay attention to her. She asked them to be quiet and sit down, but her voice faded with all the noise the students were making. Her first instinct was to make herself visible to children by raising her voice higher than theirs, but she did not want to start her relationship with them in such a disrespectful way. Then, she stood in front of the class and made a fast spin on one foot—similar to the step of a ballerina. Some children noticed her move and told other classmates what the educator had done. The

instructor made a second spin, and this time she finally got full attention of the whole class. In this regard James Smith (1967, p. 74) says that, “creative listening attention-getters not only gain children’s attention at once, but they provide strong motivation for developing the learning process.” The ballerina-spin Mrs. Valenzuela performed amazed her students and made them keep expectant and quiet waiting for her next move. She took advantage of the situation to introduce herself briefly and start the class with a warm-up. From then on, this spin became the sign for making these students turn their attention to her at the beginning of the class.

In accordance with this teacher’s experience, we have learned that students in different grades can have positive reactions to different attention-getters, so we select a variety of signs to attract the attention of each group considering the students’ age and interests, and they do work. We use songs, play the silence chain game (touch the forearm of one student and put the index finger on our lips, this student does the same with another classmate and so on), blow a whistle, stick a covered picture on the wall, write “I love you” or “I have a surprise” on the board, and some attention getters.

Integrity and Communication

The goal of the CHA is having students learn the FL in an integral and communicative way in order to allow them to use it efficiently for real world-purposes. The FL is conceived as an integral product in which all of its components (lexicon, grammar, pronunciation, etc.) contribute with their particular clues to build up meaning; in intercultural encounters, real communication takes place when the intended message is clear, so FL students’ success depends on their mastery of the target language as a whole. FL learners’ linguistic and social competences are achieved through speaking, listening, reading, writing, culture and nonverbal communication language skills, all of which should be developed in a similar proportion. Above we emphasize nonverbal communication since “sixty five percent of the social meaning of a typical two-person exchange is carried by nonverbal cues...and people are likely to understand and enjoy each other more when their beliefs coincide...” (Genelle Morain in Joyce Merrill, 1992, p. 64-65).

In most higher education institutions in which we have taught, English is fragmented in several subjects giving place to courses of grammar, literature, composition, reading, culture, pronunciation, and others; and there is a tendency to focus on the language skills that are considered relevant for each of the given subjects. For instance, in conversational courses speaking and listening are emphasized and reading, writing, and culture are frequently given less importance; likewise, in composition, writing and reading skills are stressed while speaking, listening and culture are often not. The problem with this atomized view of the FL is that students perceive a particular subject-matter as unrelated

to the others, and this perspective hinders an efficient transfer of the academic skills that they have developed in one course to support the learning objectives in others. In addition, an uneven development of language skills limits the students' progress in the target language. When these language skills are used together, they complement each other as the students access cognitive processes enabling them to make FL input comprehensible and exert successful production.

To help our students achieve a comprehensible view of the FL and develop all language skills—including culture—simultaneously, we apply principles of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT), giving a stronger emphasis to the last one. CBI is "...the concurrent teaching of academic subject-matter and SL skills, all of which are taught integrally to approach content, and since content is the point of departure, language is truly contextualized" (Brinton, Snow, and Bingham, 1989, p. 2-3). In like manner, CLT is "...an approach that has a communicative view of language and language learning but that pays attention to structural aspects too, and it aims to develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills..." (Richards and Rodgers, 2002, p.155). As we can see, these two pedagogical methods converge in viewing language as an integrated corpus, and they emphasize the development of the four language skills (we add here culture and nonverbal communication); accordingly, CBI and CLT's perspective on language integrality became our foundation for teaching (see examples in the implicit/explicit teaching and learning section below).

Meaning and Accuracy

The focus of the CHA is on meaning and accuracy since in real life learners will be required to communicate with a high degree of competence in both areas, especially when using Standard English. The CLT principle (that gives equal attention to language structure and communication) is applicable to all FL learners, but it is particularly relevant for students who are being prepared to be English educators since they are required to master the FL linguistic as well as socio-cultural contents in order to teach. Languages are used to fill information gaps and solve problems, so we set these tasks in our classes having provided the students—a priori—sufficient practice with the probable linguistic forms required to carry out these tasks, and then contextualizing the communicative act by informing what the situation is, when, where, and with whom it takes place. Conversations, discussions, role-plays, and other suitable language functions are set to trigger interaction.

Whole class, individual, pair, triad, and small group learning is arranged for students to use their particular learning-styles in their approach to the FL and also nurture from other classmates' strategies. In addition, different groupings allow variety in class activities, feedback sources, perspectives of the same object, types of interaction, and more opportunities for socialization.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Adults

- In a Basic Grammar course of the Bachelor's program for students to become English teachers, at Universidad Nacional, Mr. Álvarez taught this subject giving attention to both meaning and accuracy of the TL; i.e., the instructor emphasized the teaching of language structures but also promoted the implementation of communicative oral and written acts using grammar precisely. He presented the student-teachers with an oral or written text in which the structures that he intended to teach were embedded in high frequency. First, the instructor carried out several tasks intended to activate the students' background knowledge on the topic, having them share their personal experiences on the given situation. Vocabulary was clarified and then the pupils listened to or read the text for enjoyment. A series of exercises (cloze, drills, short answers, semantic maps, etc.) were used to study the proposed structures directly and to learn the appropriate metalanguage. Finally, the pupils were challenged to use the structures in a communicative way, by performing role-playing, interviewing, writing a paragraph, writing an anecdote and others. Consequently, the attention to grammar and its real-world use allowed the students to consolidate their acquisition of the particular structural element and to use it for real-life purposes.

The Use of Whole English

Another principle is to emphasize whole English inside and outside the class in order to provide learners more exposure to the FL and opportunities for using it. Our teaching experience has taught us that all ages of students no matter their English level—including novice learners—benefit from whole language. We have used whole language to motivate the students, for in FL settings learners may not be very interested in making an effort to learn English because: a) the context of the TC is not present to facilitate comprehension, b) the outside world does not appear to place a strong demand for its use, and c) opportunities for listening to English and using it in the FL classroom are scarce and noncreative. Due to the above circumstances, we have used whole language in the class as advised by Curtain and Pesola (1994, p. 107) since they state that:

...teachers must provide extensive FL listening opportunities to establish a target-language environment, that will send students the message that the new language is adequate and appropriate for communication, and it will also provide clues to accelerate comprehension.

However, the implementation of whole language will only be successful if the teacher is skillful in aiding students' comprehension of the TL; otherwise, the

pupils could lose interest in the class. For instance, body language, explanations, drawings, realia, and mimic are tools that help learners infer what the teacher is saying, associate their output with images in their mind, and interpret the message. This cognitive work causes students to exercise learning skills that enable them to make input comprehensible and meaningful, and develop the **sixth** language skill (nonverbal communication) explained later in this paper. In addition, whole language can help teachers manage discipline because this strategy keeps students expectant to seize the clues that help them get meaning across.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Children

- In the case of children, Mrs. Valenzuela is a witness that the implementation of whole language in class is of great benefit for the pupils. In her primary school classes, she used this technique to trigger the students' curiosity towards the FL, in turn, this enabled the children to keep focused on the clues provided to get meaning across (body language, visuals, etc.). In time, the students' interest in speaking English grew and they made an effort to communicate with the instructor in the FL as well.

Adults

- Miss Villalobos was an exchange student in the United States for two years, and during that time, she noticed how important it is to have native speakers of English visit foreign language classes. The FL students had to use English to communicate with the TL native guests; therefore, a real need for using the FL was set, and this had learners see English as purposeful. Consequently, now that Miss Villalobos teaches at the Conversational English Center (CEIC, in Spanish) from UNA, she always plans cultural encounters so that students have the opportunity to meet native speakers of English with whom they can practice the TL language. In sum, by using whole English in class, the FL pupils are exposed to particular expressions, idioms, and other informal words, and they learn a lot about culture.

Implicit and Explicit Teaching and Learning

The implicit teaching principle is favored over the explicit, but both are used to satisfy students' needs and their purposes for learning. Since meaning is derived from contextualized language (re-read section on meaning and accuracy) and students learn more if they work at learning, we emphasize implicit teaching in the class using top-down instruction, defined by Shrum and Glisan (1994, p. 25) as:

...an approach to language instruction, through which students manipulate language to communicate thoughts by using higher level skills before attending to discrete language structures with the use of lower level skills... meaning and context take the front seat which reflects how first-language learners acquire language.

The clue is to present authentic content through *in*, *while* and *post* learning stages. Through these phases pupils build comprehension and develop language skills gradually until they are ready to use what they have learned. A good example of this procedure is “The Squeaky Door,” a listening/speaking lesson we designed. From a folk-tale, third grade students worked on listening and speaking language skills, and they were exposed to a myriad of vocabulary and some grammatical elements all of which were embedded in the story; the grammar that the students would require to understand and perform in the post-learning stage was presented in a contextualized way alongside the whole teaching process. Naturally, explicit teaching, “direct teacher explanations (on grammar or content) followed by related manipulative exercises” (ibid., p. 91), is called for when the students’ learning styles require this direct perception of language and when the course is linguistic-content-based (e.g. grammar). In these cases, both teaching styles should be implemented, for implicit teaching always precedes explicit forms. In the case of young learners, implicit techniques prevail since children can pick up the structures from the context more easily; many adults can also grasp the grammar rules presented implicitly, but others require an explicit explanation at some point of the learning process.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Adults

- At Alajuela Community College³ (CUNA in Spanish) professor Valenzuela taught different levels of conversational courses in which the main objective is to make the students achieve FL speaking competence. In this institution, learning is theme-based, and speaking and reading are the language skills emphasized; writing and culture are deemphasized, at least in the beginning of the major. To compensate for the fragmented view of language and uneven development of language skills, Mrs. Valenzuela implemented procedures from CBI and CLT.
- To integrate writing in the conversational courses, professor Valenzuela used *Listen, Speak, Present: A Step-by-Step Presenter’s Workbook* by Martha Graves Cummings (1992). This book is an effective guide that prepares students to give a speech through the use of a “matrix form,” a detailed writing outline. Professor Valenzuela took advantage of this source to encourage development of writing and made the students use this matrix form effectively by training them to write their ideas properly.

Moreover, Mrs. Valenzuela checked the students' drafts twice before the final presentation, which gave them feedback for correcting and improving content and structural mistakes. These procedures taught the pupils the value of writing in order to organize their speech well. It was a tool that gave them extra practice for oral improvement in aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence of ideas, and others. The two matrix-outline drafts and the final version were assigned a score to encourage students to work it out appropriately. Furthermore, culture and listening were integrated by means of discussing several topics taken from magazines, newspapers, videos and others that the educator included in the planning of the class; these themes dealt with different aspects of foreign cultures that were attractive or puzzling to the students: the lifestyle of women in Arabia, marriage in Japan, the use of cocaine as the only means some Colombian farmers have to support their family, etc. These topics provided a myriad of new vocabulary which was useful to enhance the students' oral skills, and the lexicon was comprehensible due to its contextualization in the narrative of the written or visual texts.

- As time went by, Mrs. Valenzuela became skillful in providing learners a more integral vision of language and in using all skills in every course; these objectives were achieved through CBI and CLT integrality principles. It was not easy, though, since implementing them requires much effort and creativity on the part of teachers, for they have to master the principles, plan more carefully, and often design materials themselves. Nevertheless, based on her own experience, professor Valenzuela can say that it is worth the effort since the convergence of the six language skills provides more practice opportunities and allows more cognitive, psychomotor and affective ways to approach the TL. This convergence of skills leads to successful language learning.

Nonverbal Communication, the Sixth Language Skill

In the CHA, it is also very important to develop the six language skills integrally. In real communication acts, speaking, listening, reading, writing, cultural issues, and nonverbal communication converge to enable individuals to signify what they intend to express and interpret interlocutors' messages; thus, teachers should give equal attention to all language skills in the learning process. Here, we highlight that nonverbal communication skill—for its designation as such—is novel to the FL field and we also emphasize its relevance for students' development of English competence and success in intercultural communication. Kinesis (body movement), posture, gestures, touch, eye contact, personal space, paralanguage (laughing; crying; voice pitch: volume, rhythm; exclamations: ah!, humm..., etc.) silence and others are examples of nonverbal actions; i.e., nonverbal communication involves “all nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his/her use

of the environment and that have potential message value for the source or receiver” (Samovar, Porter and Stefany: 1998, p. 173).

Development of the skill of nonverbal communication is a must in FL learning since scholars say that it provides messages 65% of their total meaning; this implies that we have been focusing on stimulating growth of the other five language skills and they only contribute 35% of meaning to the intended message. As all components of language, nonverbal channels are culture rooted, so their meaning and appropriate or inappropriate use is culturally agreed upon according to social variables (place, time, situation, interlocutors, etc.), and individuals start learning to use these ways since they are born. Consequently, each person develops native nonverbal skills, although at a different degree of mastery, and this knowledge can be used as a starting point for encouraging learning of foreign nonverbal communication. Therefore, teachers must consider that: a) inasmuch as FL learners attain 2%, 5%, 10%, 25% FL verbal competence as they move forward in the interlanguage continuum, 98%, 95%, 90%, 75% of their nonverbal communication skills must suffice for the verbal imbalance; b) not many people are aware—even in their native communication encounters—of how they use nonverbal communication skills and their contribution to meaning; and c) the degree of nonverbal communication equivalences among different societies depends on their cultural distance, and although there could be many similarities, there will always be differences as well. For these reasons, FL learners must be made aware of their native nonverbal competence and learn foreign nonverbal intercultural similarities and differences to support meaning of their FL output appropriately.

In the learners’ native environment, nonverbal communication is taught subtly through every-day interactions; yet since FL students are not immersed in the TC, instructors must teach FL nonverbal actions implicitly and explicitly. We have pointed out that each individual develops native nonverbal skills at a different degree of mastery, so some people can express their ideas better than others. The learners’ low average or high nonverbal ability gets magnified, for good or bad accordingly, when they are performing in the FL. In the classroom, some low verbal-performers achieve to communicate their idea, in spite of their output inaccuracy, while some high-verbal performers fail in the task. Although teachers have the tendency to blame students’ verbal competence solely for low performances, paying closer attention they could discover that much of this constraint is due to low nonverbal communication competence. Learning this skill is attained by students when their teachers have high nonverbal competence, but this implicit learning-channel is not sufficient.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Children

- Comprehension of whole language in class was facilitated by extensive use of body language. Mrs. Valenzuela mimed dialogues, songs, stories,

instructions, praising and all kind of vocabulary. The students found it amusing to have a teacher who was willing to stand on chairs, dance, act and do with her body whatever it took her to support meaning of the FL input. The children viewed this technique as a game, and they soon began to use body language themselves. At the beginning it helped them achieve understanding, then it became a tool to avoid using Spanish, and finally, it gave them time to learn and gradually replace body language with English. Due to the advantages body language implies for learning a FL, teachers must be skillful in using it, especially when they work with children or beginners in general. In this regard, once a fifth-grade boy told Mrs. Valenzuela the best compliment a FL teacher can receive, he said laughing, "Teacher, you are a pictionary!" To her this compliment meant that she was using body language efficiently to help her students understand the FL and it encouraged her to keep developing this skill.

Adults

- Professors Álvarez, Villalobos and Valenzuela began to teach nonverbal communication skills explicitly when they taught conversational courses in high education; these instructors realized that many students obtained low scores because they were not aware of it and did not know how to control nonverbal behavior to support their speeches. Some of the pupils' main failures in managing nonverbal communication were: leaning against the classroom-wall or sitting on the teacher's desk (posture), putting their back to the audience, not using body language meaningfully, neglecting attention to the audience (making eye contact only with a student, the teacher, or no one), speaking with a very low tone of voice or stressing inadequately, overusing vocal segregates (eee...eee...), scratching their arms or head, etc., all of which made their presentations boring or unintelligible. Professors Álvarez, Villalobos and Valenzuela made their students aware of their native nonverbal communication constraints and taught them appropriate ones. The educators assigned topics to be researched as homework and the students had to present their assignments orally in front of the class. Learners' nonverbal behaviors were assessed by their classmates and the professors, and the feedback helped pupils improve. All the learners had developed their nonverbal skills greatly by the time the instructors implemented the mid-term oral exam and even more in the final oral exam. Then, the students transferred nonverbal learning gained to other educational situations, and the educators acknowledged this when some of the learners enrolled in other courses and used nonverbal communication efficiently. In addition to theory, the instructors used culture capsules and assimilators, research and other strategies to make learners aware of appropriate and inappropriate foreign nonverbal actions and foster

implementation of the accurate ones in role-plays and informal oral performances. Álvarez, Villalobos and Valenzuela kept encouraging growth of the students' native and foreign nonverbal communication skills in other courses they taught.

Setting/Taking Challenges

Another corollary of the CHA is having learners challenge themselves to achieve FL growth. This implies that students must be oriented to develop a positive attitude towards learning and set their own ways to go about this process by selecting and implementing strategies that suit their particular learning style. In other words, each student must compete with him/herself. Generally, learners' negative attitudes are due to one of the four following conditions or a combination of them: a) the students had previous bad learning experiences; b) they do not know how to study, so the learning process does not allow them much satisfaction; c) they have low self-esteem; and d) they do not like the instructors' teaching methodology. To encourage students to substitute negative attitudes for positive ones and self-set learning challenges that will contribute to the development of FL competence, lessons must be carefully planned to provide stimulating conditions that will raise the students' interest and their desire for accomplishment.

First, learners are integral beings that perceive the world through different perspectives, so teachers must set tasks that trigger students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Second, Ausbel "has identified at least 18 different learning styles" (in Brown, 1994, p. 105), and it seems that there are still more being studied; consequently, multiple learning strategies should be taught implicitly and explicitly to enable learners to select those that suit their particular way of processing information.

Third, students need a reason to be attentive in class, and one way this can be accomplished is by giving everyone opportunities to participate, not only risk-takers who often volunteer. However, students' participation should be a rewarding experience; if the students' performance is faulty (especially in front of the class) it could be frustrating to them. Some ways to help pupils attain success in their participations are: a) sequencing learning appropriately to prepare students to perform learning tasks well, b) providing both oral and written clear guidelines to have them approach learning tasks accurately, c) monitoring the pupils' work to give them feedback when required, and d) guiding the students through questions to elicit the correct performances/answers.

Fourth, parameters for high-standard performances (considering the students' language competence) should be set since learners will behave conforming to them, i.e., students realize that the best of them is expected and the acknowledgement of their capacity commits them to work for success.

Fifth, students should be praised individually for their progress in order to reinforce their self-esteem, emphasize what they are doing right, and motivate them to keep going.

And sixth, teachers should use self-assessment as a means to subtly make the students aware of their positive and negative behaviors towards learning and lead them to strive for self-improvement.

Therefore, because negative attitudes stop individuals from learning, teachers should foment a positive and resolute attitude in students by motivating them to make a self-commitment, in order to discover their hidden potentialities for learning and putting great effort in attaining language growth. Nonetheless, we remind teachers that learning is a personal decision; consequently, although the CHA can help instructors to set appropriate and encouraging conditions to learn, the students are the ones who decide to ascribe to the process or not.

A core strategy to have students achieve FL learning is challenging them to make their best effort in the learning process, and this can be done by promoting instrumental as well as integrative motivation in the classroom; yet, the success of this strategy is ultimately defined by the students' own will. Most FL students are interested in developing their language competence and communication skills to the level of native-like speakers, but some of them are often not willing to devote much effort or time to it; some views such as "I want it easy" and "I will do it later" prevails among a great percentage of students—especially teenagers or young adult learners. Although we believe these attitudes are natural at that age, for the students' own sake, teachers must not conform to these behaviors.

Educators must promote instrumental motivation, it implies "the students' interest in using the TL as a means to achieve goals such as gaining a necessary qualification or improving employment prospects" (Littlewood, 1996, p. 57). This type of motivation is pertinent in our setting since bilingual individuals (English/Spanish) are highly valued in the work arena; they have good chances for upward mobility within a job, and they also have job opportunities to choose from. When we have our students become aware of this fact, and they are challenged to exert an effort in their learning process to achieve instrumental goals, they often respond positively to accomplish challenging learning tasks that allow them FL progress. Likewise, teachers must promote integrative motivation defined by Littlewood (*ibid*) as the genuine interest students have in learning the language of the second language community in order to communicate and gain closer contact with them and their culture. This type of motivation is also pertinent in Costa Rica for today, more than ever, people have opportunities for studying, traveling, and making business in English speaking countries; and due to increasing development of tourism in our country, students have more opportunities for interacting with English speaking people within national boundaries as well. When pupils are motivated to learn about the foreign culture and they develop interest in understanding it, they are not only willing but also eager to accomplish the learning tasks that will enable them to improve their English proficiency.

However, no matter how efficient teachers are in promoting both types of motivation, there will always be some students who decide to make the least effort in learning, and this is their responsibility. We used to blame ourselves when—in spite of our effort to motivate learners—some of them were mediocre.

We thought that maybe these pupils required a special type of motivation that we were unfamiliar with, and that this failure on our part was keeping them from adopting positive attitudes towards learning. Yet, we realized from Robert Terry (in Crouse, Campana, & Rosenbusch, 1995, p. 3-4) that "...motivation is the force or incentive within a person that stimulates him or her to have an active interest...so, in essence, motivation comes from the learner." Therefore, motivation is not outside the students but inside them, and it is mainly the pupils' will for accomplishment that leads them to approach learning with enthusiasm and effort.

Reviewing briefly, we believe teachers must try to stimulate students' best effort in learning by means of promoting instrumental and integrative motivation, but we also believe that the major responsibility for their progress lies in the students themselves since Brown (1994, p. 281) remarks that "SL students must engage in their own pursuit of language competence." Therefore, instructors' challenge is to make students aware of the benefits of learning a FL render, and students' challenge is to find within themselves the strength to apply effective actions to achieve this knowledge.

Creativity Promotes Learning and Classroom Management

Creativity is "the ability to produce new and original ideas and things: imagination and inventiveness" (Longman Dictionary of English..., 1992, p.299), and it is a must in the educational field. The CHA fosters creative skills in teachers and students, for the whole learning process poses challenges on them. For instance, instructors must be attentive to the needs of the learners and surprise them with varied and stimulating teaching practices and with appealing materials they select, adapt, or design; and the students are led to work through the learning process with a high degree of autonomy that helps them develop original and creative oral/written productions and materials.

In addition, educators also have to implement new strategies, techniques and tactics to replicate real-world conditions in the class, in order to create a need for communication and allow students to solve problems by using the FL. The learners as well have to use their imagination to write original pieces, prepare oral presentations, design materials to illustrate their performances in role-plays, etc. Due to creativity, teachers find pleasure in teaching and students in learning since their ideas contribute to make the class varied, original, and meaningful.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Children

- Creativity—portrayed in the materials, activities and strategies used—was a main tool that Mrs. Valenzuela used in class to set the best ambience possible for children's acquisition of the FL. Using toys such as puppets,

stuffed animals, and Barbie-dolls in class generated a non-threatening learning environment and arouse young children's interest prompting them to pay attention when teaching was performed by these toys. In regard to young students' learning, Gertrude Moskowitz (1978, p.18) claims that "for learning to be significant, feelings must be recognized and put to use," and the best resources to use students' feelings in favor of learning are toys, for children easily develop strong ties of affection with them. Professor Valenzuela triggered the students' imagination to have them believe that the toys were English speakers that had come to play with them and to assist the teacher in her lesson. Using these toys in the class was such a success that the students always searched in her bag to see who had come to class that day: Pimpy the frog, Beto the dog, Panda the bear, Natasha the Barbie-doll....

Furthermore, hands-on activities enabled children to produce concrete materials that increased their interest in the class because these activities contextualized the TL and made it comprehensible. According to Curtain and Pesola, "Children throughout the elementary school years learn best from concrete situations; the more frequently the manipulation of actual objects can accompany language use...the greater the impact of the language itself" (1993, p.122). For instance, the students drew pictures to demonstrate listening comprehension of the stories the teacher told or that were played on the tape recorder; they followed commands to make a fruit salad in order to learn the concept of healthy food and vocabulary related to diverse fruits; learners made clay home-furniture to learn vocabulary about the home theme; they wrote letters and mailed them to their parents and relatives to invite them to the English festival. Hands-on activities motivated the students since these allowed them more practice inside and outside the class; some of the products developed through this technique were taken home and children had the opportunity to use English to share with their parents what they had learned through these activities.

Evaluation for Real World Purposes

The evaluation in the CHA is integrative and communicative conforming to its instructional practices. The tests are contextualized with interesting content to elicit meaningful production. Evaluation is based on solving problems, filling in information gap exercises, and other types of communicative items. High evaluation standards are set to encourage learners to do their best in the test-tasks, and clear guidelines are provided to assist students in understanding what they are to do.

Illustrating the Above Rationale

Children

- Professor Valenzuela sought to test children's oral production in the target language, by designing creative oral tests and scoring guides. Congruently with the Teaching English program in which this educator was formed at UNA, she knew how to evaluate teenagers and adults' FL learning progress but not childrens'. Then she realized that tests must be a reflection of the methodology, techniques and strategies used in class. This is important since Bachman (1995, p. 300-301) says that "in order to obtain a complete measure of an individual's language proficiency, language tests should place the same requirements on test takers as language performance in non-test situations do."

Adults

- Miss Villalobos has had the possibility, over the years, to apply different techniques to evaluate and assess FL learners at CEIC, especially adults. Since the emphasis of this language school is on listening and speaking, classes and evaluation are focused on these skills. However, reading and writing are not left behind because the main objective of CEIC is teaching English as a FL in an integral way. Likewise, culture and nonverbal communication are always highlighted among students.
- In order to evaluate the learners' English proficiency according to the level, conversations in pairs are often recorded in the lab and these are later heard by the instructors to evaluate aspects such as communication, content, interaction, vocabulary, fluency, grammar and pronunciation. Students are given a situation in which they have to play a role and carry out a spontaneous and natural conversation. In addition, they make use of different structures, vocabulary and expressions studied and practiced in class in a communicative way. During the conversations, learners need to use the language as in real life, which makes it very useful and successful.

To sum up, the CHA teachers must be "good managers" and the students "challenge takers," and both have power on the learning process. Professors are in charge of managing learning conditions to set the best positive instructional environment for students to learn; so teachers must make sure that all learners get equal opportunities to process information appropriately; and they motivate students to make their own decisions for attaining success. To grant the above, instructors must exercise authority with firmness and sensitivity to allow pupils an organized, clear, meaningful and encouraging perspective of the curriculum they are to approach. In like manner, students are in charge of their learning process. They must take responsibility for using provided learning tools efficiently; select strategies that help them work better; and risk to set ambitious—but

attainable—personal learning goals through self-challenge.

Evidence has shown that the Challenge Approach has been effective, over the years, to lead the dynamics of the training provided by the teacher-instructors in PROCAPRI. Due to the CHA, the workshops of the outreach program of Universidad Nacional have been evaluated by its participants as enjoyable, meaningful, and practical. Hence, in-service English teachers and MEP English advisors all around the country request PROCAPRI workshops. The CHA has also permeated the Bachelor's Program in Teaching English for Primary School of the ELCL, at UNA, setting the conditions for multiplying the benefits of this teaching/learning philosophy.

Granted that teachers are always seeking for effective and affective pathways in their profession, we invite you to implement the Challenge Approach in your teaching and learning. It is definitely a philosophy that demands a strong commitment is required, but there are great professional rewards for both CHA instructors and their learners.

Notes

1. Programa de Capacitación para Profesores de Inglés de I y II Ciclos.
2. Centro de Investigación y Docencia en Educación.
3. Colegio Universitario de Alajuela.

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