Chapter 9

English Language Development for Non-Native Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is describing a plan for a mentor teacher assisting pre-service teachers during their practicum using English in an Emirati national school. The plan consists of 20 lessons that covers speaking, reading, listening, and writing to Kindergarten to primary school age students (3 – 12 years old). As an educator, the author is constantly looking for ways to enhance student’s communicative abilities, especially non-native speakers of English. There is a constant need to provide scaffolding and learning situations to make sure pre-service education students feel comfortable using English language in a classroom setting. This chapter will give background information for people who want to do research into incorrect language usage and its effect on students in the classroom. It also describes an outline for a course to develop language proficiency and confidence to use communicative language in a classroom setting.

INTRODUCTION

The pre-service teachers who are involved in this plan are Emirati Nationals (females between 18 and 23 years old), who are non-native English speaking pre-service teachers who will graduate with a Bachelor of Education with “Primary Generalist” or “Early Childhood” concentrations. They are at an IELTS 5.0 level or B1/B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference. The author observed these students struggling to use English correctly in reading, writing, speaking and listening on a daily basis (Cullen 1994). For example: “What is the brice of this packet?” In this instance, /p/ and /b/ are allophonic and tend to be used randomly (Swan & Smith, 2001). This sparked the author’s interest in developing a more specialized course to suit their needs. Subsequently, the choice of this specialism is spoken language development for pre-service Emirati female non-native speaking teachers (NSST’s) teachers. Burns and Richards (2009) stress that language development starts in the college environment with interaction with...
teachers and the English they learn in the classroom. The teaching practicum experience then creates the link with the theoretical and the practical side of teaching. Thus, the imperative must, asking yes/no questions, pronunciation, word choice and making general conversation, keeping conversations going, transitions and set phrases for greetings constitute the bulk of the course (Hughes, 1981; Hughes, Moate & Raatikainen, 2007).

This chapter is the platform to design a course to enhance their communicative needs, and give pre-service teachers concrete examples to use whilst in the college and on teaching practicums.

Will formal, systematic instruction enhance pre-service teacher communicative accuracy?

BACKGROUND

As their classroom teacher, the author’s personal interactions and observations with this group have spanned over a two-year period. This contact led the author to the conclusion that the pre-service teachers are going into schools not fully equipped to deal with real life language interactions with the students they teach: reading, writing, listening and speaking (Cullen 1994). According to Adger, Snow and Christian (2003), language development requires teachers to know that language is culturally bound and that errors will be made by the students in classes. They also need to be able to choose appropriate materials that meet the language needs of the students. Furthermore, they need the ability to assess student language needs and plan interventions as required. Finally, they need to have a sound background in what language is and how to teach it. Below is an example of an interaction where the pre-service teacher did not intervene with an error made by a student.

“I want a apple” was stated by one of the students. It was repeated by the student teacher who then told the student “excellent”.

The above example shows that there is a distinction between proficiency levels of “…a native speaker and a non-native speaker” (Kirkpatrick, 2007). The native speaker would pick up on the mistake and correct it accordingly. In contrast, Arva and Medgyes (2000) believe that non-English speaking teachers (NEST’s) do have a distinct advantage over native English speakers. Native speakers don’t have the language proficiency to address errors in the L1, thus leading to frustration from both parties (Arva & Medgyes, 2000). There is a need for explicit teaching of the grammar associated with language and then practice using it in as close to authentic situations as possible.

Therefore, the important issue here is that nonnative speakers are the ones who have to develop and facilitate a “…English-speaking atmosphere…” in the classroom (Gardner & Gardner, 2000). They need to give clear instructions, question the students and develop an understanding of the response (James, 2001). For an example in the classroom, they will use the imperative - must to give commands and directions to the students.

One way to meet the requirements of language development for pre-service teachers is through experiential learning. This can be achieved through involvement in “concrete experiences, reflective observation…, abstract conceptualization…, and active experimentation” (Calpito, 2012), will lead the pre-service teachers to develop not only the skills necessary but link the conceptual theoretical ideas behind language development into classroom practice (Johnson and Golombek, 2011). Furthermore, Dale (1969 cited in Beard & Wilson, 2006, p. 108-109) postulates that activity based learning (Gardner and Gardner, 2000) is more beneficial than reading about how to be a better teacher. For the non-native