

GENERAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES

Suggestions for Teaching Culture

Systems A, B and C have a **La cultura y tú** (*Culture and You*) section at the end of each lesson. This section offers information, listening opportunities in the target language, and hands-on activities about a specific Spanish-speaking country or region.

These elements are simply an introduction. They should, by no means, be the sole means of integrating culture into the program. In the Lesson Planner Cards, you will find suggestions and information that will help you incorporate cultural instruction into your daily lessons.

Cultures are not static. They are dynamic and evolve over time. Therefore, it is important to build the skills students will need to gather information, make observations, and formulate general and specific conclusions; to compare and contrast cultural information objectively.

As students gain competence and confidence in communicating facts and opinions about their own world, they can develop an awareness of those same aspects of culture in the Spanish-speaking world. They can begin to recognize similarities and differences through observation. They can begin to experience how behavior is affected by culture through role-play activities, research projects, and interviews with native speakers.

It is recommended that you use maps, slides, and other visual aids to lay the foundation of basic skills and information. For example, students may need to learn first that geography and climate greatly affect how people live before they investigate a specific region of the Spanish-speaking world. Likewise, they may need to recognize first that in their own culture, life in a big city differs from life in a small town or rural area before they can appreciate these aspects in other cultures. The following suggestions will help you add variety to the teaching of culture in the

classroom as well as build skills that will aid students in understanding other ways of life.

- **Use maps and globes** to help identify areas of the world where Spanish is spoken—including in the United States. Whenever possible, have students locate specific countries and areas being discussed or depicted and then determine the relationship of that area to the place where they live.
- **Show slides and videos** that relate to the theme of a unit to make cultural information more concrete and meaningful. For example, with the increased prevalence of Spanish-language television programs, students may be exposed to aspects of the culture that previously would have required them to visit the culture. Practical examples of greeting and leave-taking, food, homes, family life, popular music—all may be depicted in programs broadcast on the Spanish-language networks.
- **Invite native speakers** to your class as often as possible—neighbors, exchange students, business people—to interact with the students. Preparation for the visit may consist of presenting background information on the visitor, such as country and city of origin, having students research the country, preparing suitable questions for the visitor in advance, and so forth. Likewise, the visitor will need information about what the students are studying and the questions they will ask.
Activities following the visit can include writing thank-you notes in Spanish and conducting discussions about what the students learned.
- **Create a cultural environment.** If you have your own classroom, you may display artifacts, create culture corners, and provide a “lending library” of resources and references for information gathering. Through audio cassettes, CDs, and radio programs, you can expose students to the diversity of music in Spanish-speaking countries, from well-known folk songs to currently popular rock music and music videos.

Suggestions for Correcting Errors

The support of communication in the second language by encouraging student risk-taking, vulnerability and intuition is a fundamental principle of language acquisition. For many teachers who have been schooled in more traditional methods of teaching, this means reconsidering the way they have historically approached their own classrooms and, perhaps, learning to be risk-takers themselves.

At one point or another, all second-language learners have experienced the frustration of trying to communicate a message while being interrupted over accuracy issues by a well-intentioned listener. The second-language learner's level of frustration rises to such a point that the message is often lost, his or her confidence is shaken, and the corrections are ignored. Even worse, fear and reluctance to communicate in the second language replace the initial enthusiasm for communicating a message.

This is not to say that errors should not be corrected. Making mistakes is a natural, inevitable part of the learning process. If left alone, mistakes may become deeply ingrained bad habits. If corrected in a positive, nurturing way, they can be eliminated without creating anxiety in the learner.

Knowing What and When to Correct

In general, researchers have shown that teachers who select the errors to be corrected at the proper time can be more effective than those who correct by the interruptive reflex method.

In the 'productive' areas of speaking and writing, it is important to correct errors that essentially confound communication. That is, if an error makes a message unintelligible, it should be corrected. If an error creates a barrier to listening and reading, it should be dealt with directly. In the literature on second-language acquisition, these errors are called *global errors*, in contrast to minor, *local errors*. If a global error is made frequently, it is

important to correct that error first, while temporarily ignoring a smaller error or slip within the same message. Researchers have also shown that correction is effective at the time of practice, for example, while doing exercises that follow a pattern. Conversely, correction can have an adverse effect when done while students are earnestly trying to communicate freely, for example, during paired interviews or conversations.

It is advantageous as well to distinguish between an *error* and a *mistake*. Generally speaking, linguists consider errors to be a positive part of the language acquisition process. They are dynamic, creative, and of transitional influence. A mistake is an ingrained (fossilized) pattern in the communication and, if left unattended, will, in all probability, remain as part of the language user's pattern of communication.

Remember that linguistic accuracy is a 'destination' and not a 'point of departure'. Part of the consideration as to when to correct is linked to how far along your students are with any given language concept. And at no time should the rules (*conventions*) of the language impede the creation (*invention*) of the language.

Knowing How to Correct

Guiding students to discover an error for themselves and to correct it on their own has generally proven more effective than supplying the correct answer or form for them. The following suggestions have been gleaned from the literature on techniques of error correction in the second-language classroom.

One approach to correcting through gentle guidance is to repeat what the student has said up to the point of the error. Often this will cue the student to recognize the mistake and then correct it alone.

S: Me duele las manos.

T: (*holding up two hands*) Hay dos manos. Me...

S: Me duelen las manos.

Another possibility is to provide an on-the-spot multiple choice, thus allowing the student to choose the correct response (e.g., **¿Me duele las manos o me duelen las manos?**). If the student has had sufficient initial input and modeling, he or she will be able to recognize the correct response and choose it. You can also correct an error by supplying your own response to serve as a model (e.g., **A mí no me duelen las manos. Me duelen los pies. ¿Qué te duele a ti?**).

Students may make an error or fail to respond when they do not understand the question or do not fully understand what is expected of them. In these instances, you may rephrase or restate the question or provide additional models to clear up the confusion. A confusing word or expression can also be cleared up by either allowing the student to see it in writing or, if the phrase is familiar from oral work, to hear it spoken.

Your acquaintance with and application of the research on error correction in the second-language classroom will be rewarded through your students in their positive attitude and willingness to take communicative risks.

Suggestions for Structuring the Class Period

Spanish language instruction is far from standardized; the number of classes, length of class periods, and class size and composition are as varied as the schools in which they are offered. *¡Viva el español!* has been structured to provide flexibility and ease of adaptation for most types of Spanish-as-a-second-language classrooms.

Multisection Class Periods

A multisection class period allows the freedom to adapt activities to fit the structure of any situation. Each section of a class period serves to keep the routine familiar, yet interesting and stimulating, by virtue of the variety of activities.

- The *warm-up* serves as a bridge to the target-language. It affords a brief period for students to begin thinking and responding in Spanish.
- *Review activities* may act as reminders of material recently learned or of vocabulary and structures learned previously. These review activities may take the form of continuing games, “show and tell,” brief role plays, pencil-and-paper puzzles, or even a rereading of a passage or conversation. Numerous suggestions for review activities are listed in the Lesson Planner Cards.
- *Presentation periods* include the presentation and/or explanation of the core vocabulary, language structure, conversation, or culture concept corresponding to the appropriate section of the lesson being studied.
- *Activities* allow students to use the target language in varied situations, by completing activities, interviewing classmates, preparing Big Books, etc.
- *Closing activities* briefly wrap up the class session.