

Sound Bites for Better Teaching

Achievement vs Proficiency: knowing what to do with what you know

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conjugate “aller” in the past tense vs. tell me where you went yesterday

An achievement-based curriculum focuses on teaching content and facts while a proficiency-based curriculum helps students develop communicative skills. As illustrated above, the former asks students to conjugate verbs or to change the verb from one tense to another in isolated non-authentic sentences whereas the latter puts students in authentic real-life situations by asking them to actually use the past tense to impart information. Students must have the opportunity to practice using language in a range of contexts to be encountered in the target language, to practice carrying out a range of functions likely to be necessary in dealing with others in the target culture, and to express their own meaning as early as possible after productive skills have been introduced in the course of instruction.

Self Evaluation (no right or wrong answers)

How much time do you devote to teaching a concept vs. letting the students learn it by practicing using it?

Do you feel more comfortable being the sage on the stage or being the guide on the side?

How important is accuracy in the development of fluency?

How many opportunities do your students have to be creative in the use of L2?

How much time do you devote to drill work?

Do you teach vocabulary in context or in lists of words?

How much of your time is spent in doing the activities found in textbooks, in workbooks, or in teacher-developed worksheets?

How much of your time is spent giving opportunities for active communicative interaction among students?

How much of the language to which students are exposed is authentic?

Do you feel comfortable letting students work in groups? Why or why not?

TIP

Set aside at least 15 minutes in every class for students to practice using the content and the grammar in a spontaneous communicative activity, e.g., using a cooperative learning activity such as the inside/outside circle as follows: Tell your partner the following:

Content (Likes and Dislikes)

1. what sports you like and why
2. what TV shows you like and why
3. what vegetables you do not like
4. your favorite school subject and your least favorite

Grammar (Past Tense)

1. five things you did yesterday afternoon
2. five things you did this morning before school
3. three things you did last night before going to bed
4. three places you went to last week