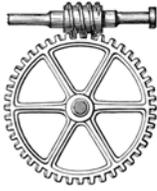


Sound Bites for Better Teaching

Not all activities lead to proficiency

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mechanical



meaningful



communicative

Of the countless amounts of activities that students are exposed to, whether in textbooks, workbooks, teacher-made, or computer generated, it is important to understand that so much time is spent in activities that do not lead one to become proficient in the foreign language. A mechanical or manipulative activity is one that can be done successfully whether or not the student understands the words used in the activity: it's often a case of matching the words in the answer with those of the question or of applying a grammar rule. A meaningful activity demands that the student understand only some of the words to get to the correct answer but there is no sharing of information involved. A communicative activity requires that the student understand the message of the language and expects him to fill an information gap by encouraging him to express creatively his thoughts, opinions, or ideas. If students are to become proficient in L2, much more time must be spent engaging them in communicative activities.

Self Evaluation (no right or wrong answers)

Do you know the difference between a skill-getting activity and a skill-using activity?

What percentage of the activities in a typical chapter of your textbook is skill-getting as opposed to skill-using?

How do you define "communication?"

How much time do you devote to communicative activities in a week?

Does a mechanical activity have any use at all? Explain.

What do mechanical and meaningful activities have in common?

Of the three types of activities, which are the easiest to plan? Why?

Of the three types, which are better suited to develop accuracy? Fluency? Explain.

TIP

The easiest way to make a mechanical and meaningful activity communicative is by personalizing the activity. Example:

Mechanical: Rewrite the sentence using the correct present-tense form of the verb in parentheses.

Nous (manger) nos frites.

Meaningful: Rewrite the sentence using the correct form of the appropriate verb in parentheses.

Nous (manger, marcher) nos frites.

Communicative: Answer the following questions.

Qu'est-ce que tu préfères les frites, les petits pois, ou les carottes?

Quel restaurant offre les meilleures frites?

Qu'est-ce que tu mets sur tes frites?