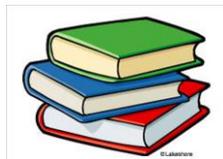


Sound Bites for Better Teaching
Teaching Foreign Languages as a Life Skill
 Marcel LaVergne Ed.D.



<p>Correct family vocabulary homework. <i>Review comparatives and superlatives.</i> <i>Introduce past tense of regular verbs.</i> <i>Answer the questions about the French family based on the reading on page 25.</i></p>	<p>Share your family tree in groups of four. <i>Compare your family members in age, height, etc.</i> <i>Ask your partner to tell you 5 things he did last Saturday.</i> <i>State 5 differences between your family and a French family.</i></p>
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Academic subject

Life skill

Is a foreign language an academic subject or a life skill? If time in the classroom is spent mostly on vocabulary development and grammar rules, if assessment consists in testing word knowledge and verb conjugations, then foreign language is treated as an academic subject in an achievement-based curriculum. If, on the other hand, some time is given to developing language functions in simulated real-life situations, if the focus is on developing and assessing the four language skills, then foreign language is considered a life skill in a proficiency-type curriculum. Skill-getting activities such as conjugating verbs, changing words from singular to plural, or replacing nouns by pronouns must also be accompanied by skill-using opportunities such as expressing likes and dislikes, comparing and contrasting, or giving and seeking information.

Self Evaluation (no right or wrong answers)

When planning lessons, do you label activities as skill-getting and as skill-using?

Are you aware of how much time you devote in a week to skill-getting activities as opposed to skill-using activities?

Which type do you prefer? Explain.

How does the role of grammar differ depending on which point of view you believe: academic subject or life skill?

Would you assess student progress the same or differently depending on the point of view? Explain.

Which point of view does your textbook advocate?

Based on department conversations, do you and your colleagues stress one over the other? Explain.

Can you name 10 functions of language? Hint: refusing, complimenting, agreeing, etc.

Of the two, which are you most likely to use outside of the classroom: conjugating the verb to go in the past tense or telling someone where you went yesterday?

How does academic talk in the classroom differ from ordinary speech outside of it? How well do you prepare your students for that world?

TIP

For each skill-getting activity in the chapter you are currently on in your textbook, create a skill-using one to go along with it. Use the examples given in the boxes above.