Teaching Philosophy

Inherent in the learning of any language is communication. Language does not take place in a vacuum, as is often presented in learning texts (Breen & Candlin, 1979, as cited in Richard-Amato, 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It then follows that the factors to take into consideration during any communicative act (written or spoken) are the five wh-questions (*who, where, what, when, why*) and *how*. That is, *who* are the interlocutors, *where* and *when* will the communicative act take place, *what* will they be communicating about, *why* is the communicative act taking place, and *how* does the communicator plan to get the intended meaning across to the interlocutor (Hymes, 1971, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Communication, in its most basic form, involves the negotiation of meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This is especially true for language learners who have yet to acquire sufficient linguistic knowledge to adequately express themselves or to understand others. It follows, then, that language learners should be taught the fundamental tools they can use to negotiate meaning for themselves in real-life situations. This can be as basic as formulaic chunking of phrases or as complex as embedding.

The proper method of negotiation of meaning, however, changes depending on the physical environment. In immersion settings such as the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, it is highly important to teach forms that are pragmatically acceptable in mainstream society. In other contexts, such as the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, pragmatic forms that are conducive to communication and negotiation of meaning may differ because of influences from the local language and culture.

Because the physical environment in which the language learner is in plays such an important role in the acquisition of that language, it is important to find out the student’s purpose
of learning English. Is it to communicate with native speakers of English, or other non-native speakers of English? Is the communication to occur in a location where the majority of the population speaks English, or not? Answering these questions, along with others, will help the instructor tailor the teaching material to suit the needs of language learners. Without these answers, the teacher would have to resort to teaching language as it occurs in a vacuum.

Once the learning purpose has been determined, the instructor’s responsibility is to create a dynamic and effective learning environment. A dynamic language classroom combines intrinsic with extrinsic motivation, incorporates Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, and relies on the instructor to design an appropriate curriculum. Though constructed to address testing, Kunnan’s (2000) Test Fairness framework is one that can be applied to a student-teacher relationship. That is, the instructor should strive for “validity” in the design of assessment, an “absence of bias” in the treatment of students, an open door policy allowing students equal “access,” and consistency in the matter of “administration” (p. 37). Last but not least, the instructor should be aware of the possible “social consequences” of his or her instruction (p. 37). Faithful execution of these guiding principles should result in a dynamic and effective learning environment.
References

