

How Languages Are Learned:

Great Expectations in 2016

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- How can research on second language acquisition (SLA) help teachers?

- 1976 Tarone, Swain, & Fathman: *Some limitations to the classroom applications of current SLA research*
- 1978 Hatch: *Apply with caution*
- 1980 Long: *Inside the "black box" ... classroom research on language learning*

- 1982 Krashen: *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*

1985 Lightbown: *Great Expectations*

- “Ten generalizations” based on SLA research to that date.

1985 Lightbown: *Great Expectations*

- SLA research
 - cannot tell teachers *what* to teach
 - The research doesn't cover enough language features or systems
 - cannot tell teachers *how* to teach
 - Too little research *in* classrooms
 - can help set *expectations*

2000 Lightbown: *Classroom SLA Research & Second Language Teaching*

- Big changes in teaching methods
 - Communicative language teaching (CLT)
 - Content-based language teaching (CBLT)
 - The need for both ***language***-focused and ***meaning***-focused learning

- Was SLA research in 2000 telling teachers what “everybody knows”?
—Perhaps not.

2016 SLA Research Update

- Far more classroom-based research
- More teachers are aware of findings
- Teacher education programs include SLA
- Some textbooks written by SLA experts
- And yet....



In 2016

- Are the ten generalizations...
 - Still representative of SLA research findings?
 - Relevant to classroom teaching?
 - Accessible to teachers?

1. Adults and adolescents can *acquire* a second language.

2. The learner creates a systematic
interlanguage...

3. There are predictable sequences in acquisition...

4. Practice does not make perfect.

- DeKeyser (2007) defines practice as “specific activities in the second language engaged in systematically, deliberately, with the goal of developing knowledge of and skills in the second language.”

We get better at what we practice.

- Practice

...taking tests to get better at taking tests

...mechanical drills to get better at drills

...reading to get better at reading

...conversation to improve interaction skills

Practice does not make perfect.

But it helps if we

- practice the right things
- practice enough
- vary contexts & processes for practice

Practice the right things...



Practice enough...

- Child L1 = 10,000 – 20,000 hours
- School years = 15,000 more hours
- Canadian early immersion = 5,000 hours
- Foreign language instruction = 100s of hours, stretched over years

Vary the contexts & processes of practice



The importance of variety

- Pedagogical reasons
 - Keep it interesting
 - Respond to different backgrounds, learning preferences, and abilities

The importance of variety

- Cognitive psychology explanations
 - The specificity of practice (we get better at what we practice)
 - Transfer appropriate processing

Transfer appropriate processing

- It is easier to remember something that we know when “retrieval” conditions are similar to learning conditions.
 - More varied learning conditions lead to more varied retrieval conditions.

5. Knowing a language rule does not mean one will be able to use it in communicative interaction.

Metalinguistic knowledge

- An end in itself?
- As a monitor?
- Declarative knowledge, to be proceduralized through practice?
- As an aid to “noticing”?

6. Isolated explicit error correction is usually ineffective in changing language behavior.

...but sustained, targeted, clear *feedback on error* is an essential part of second language acquisition.

7. For most adult learners, acquisition stops before... native-like mastery.

8. One cannot achieve ... command of a second language in one hour a day.

Drip Feed and Full Flow

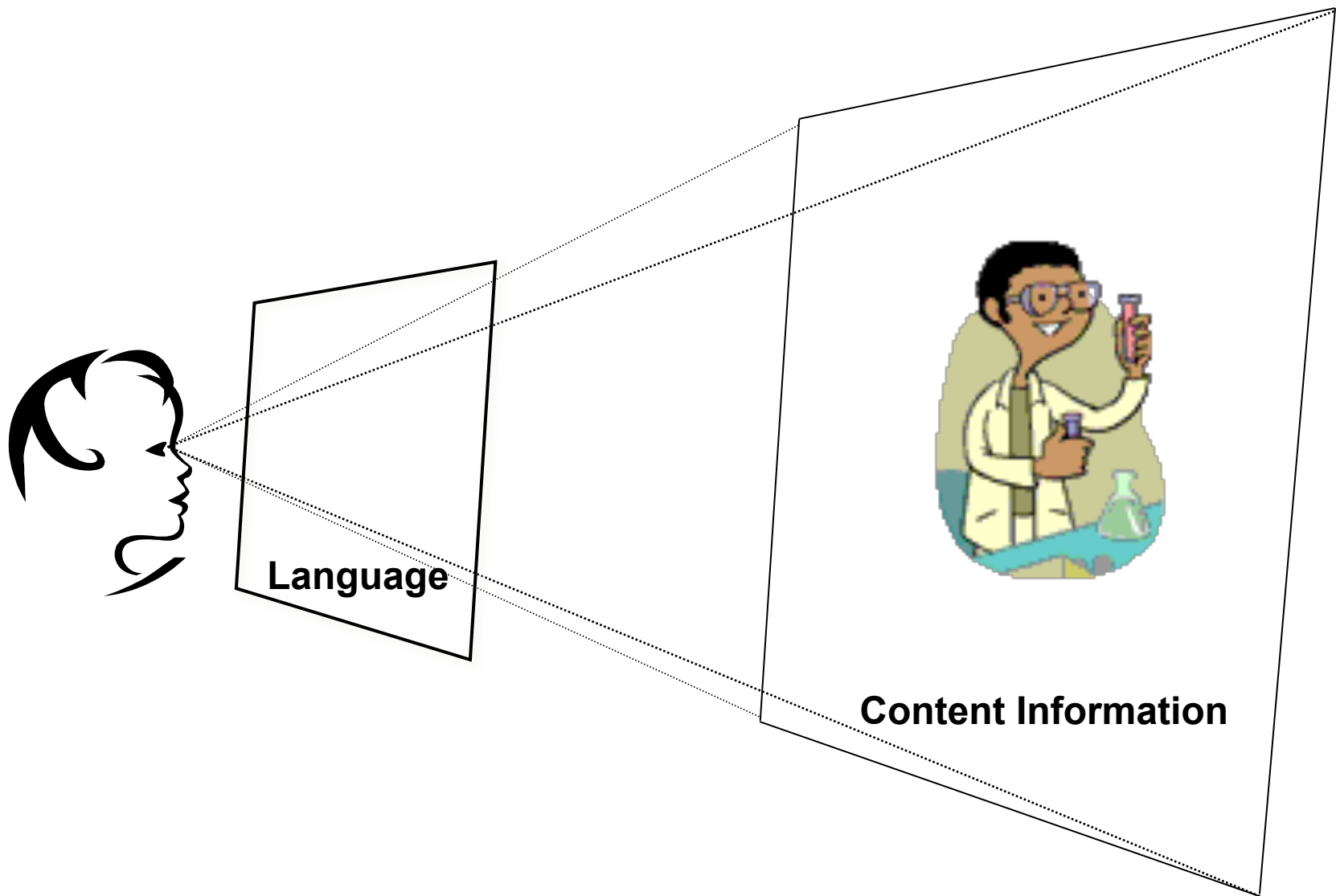


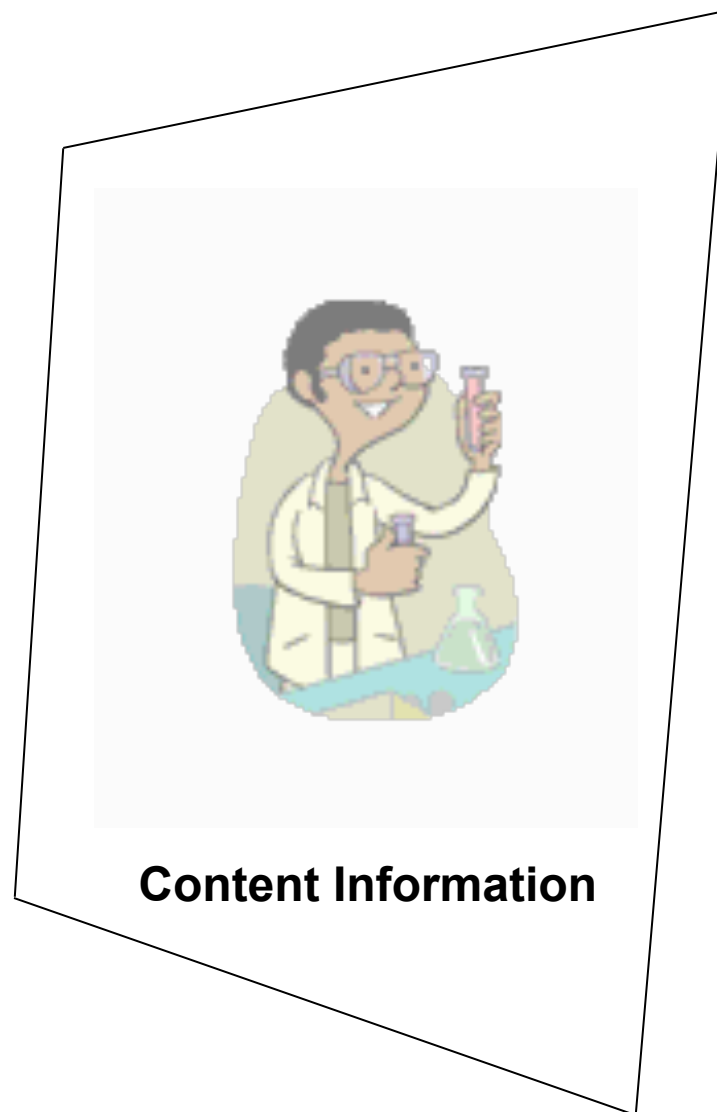
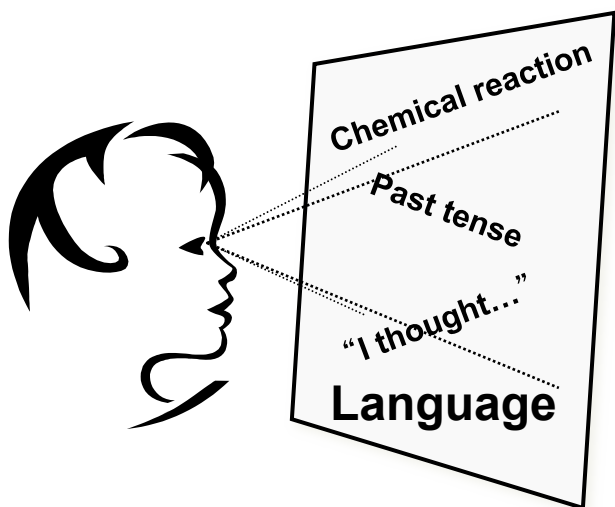
“Full Flow” approaches to L2 learning

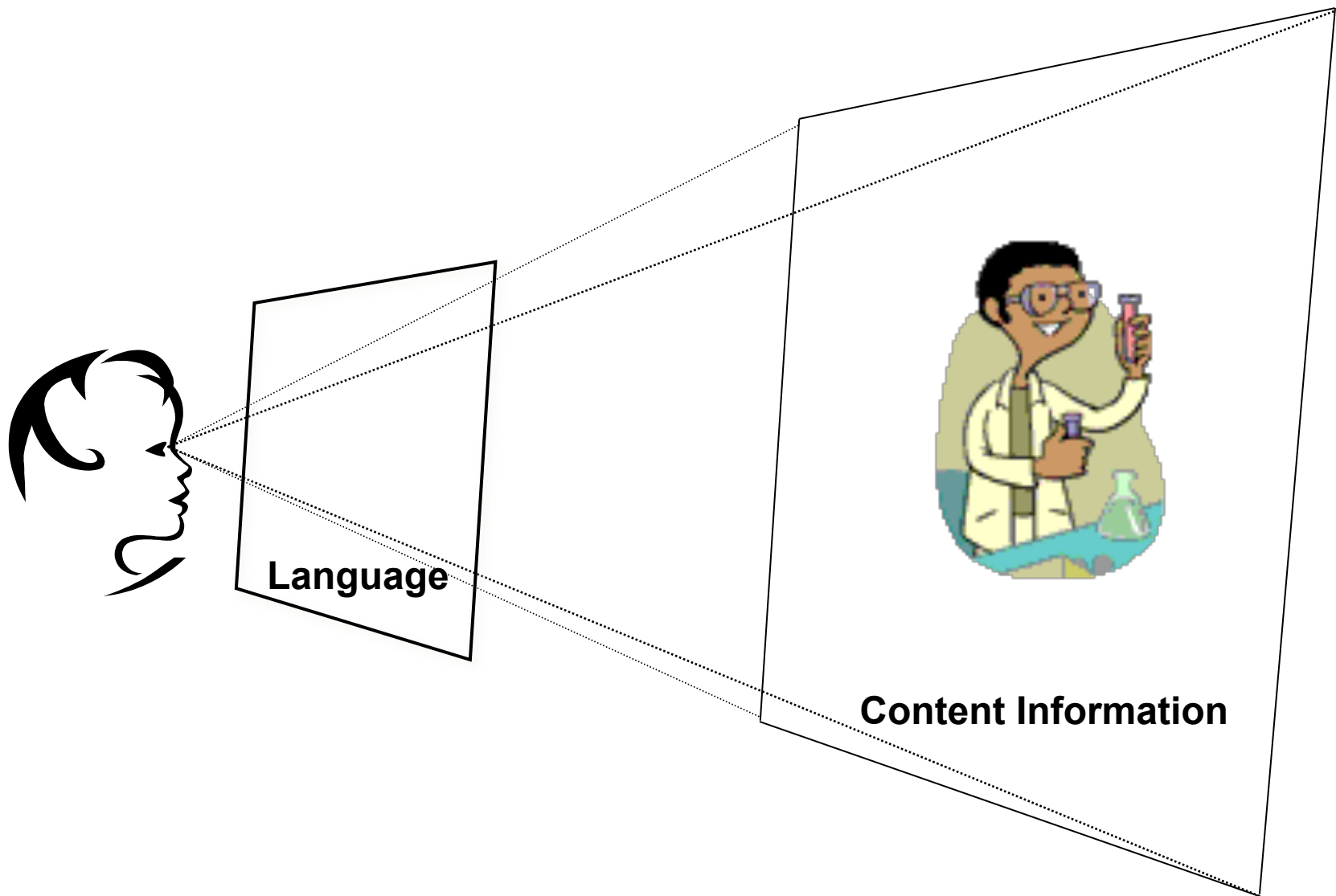
- *Intensive ESL*
- *“Canadian” Immersion*
- *Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)*
- *Content-Based Language Teaching*

9. The learner's task is enormous because language is enormously complex.

10. A learner's ability to understand language in a meaningful context exceeds his/her ability to comprehend decontextualized language and to produce language of comparable complexity and accuracy.







What to do?

- What is a practical way of using knowledge from SLA research to guide teaching?
- One answer: Paul Nation's "Four Strands in Language Teaching"

Nation's Four Strands

- A framework for designing lessons, curricula, courses
- Based on vocabulary learning
- Compatible with SLA research

Paul Nation's Four Strands in Language Teaching



Meaning-focused input



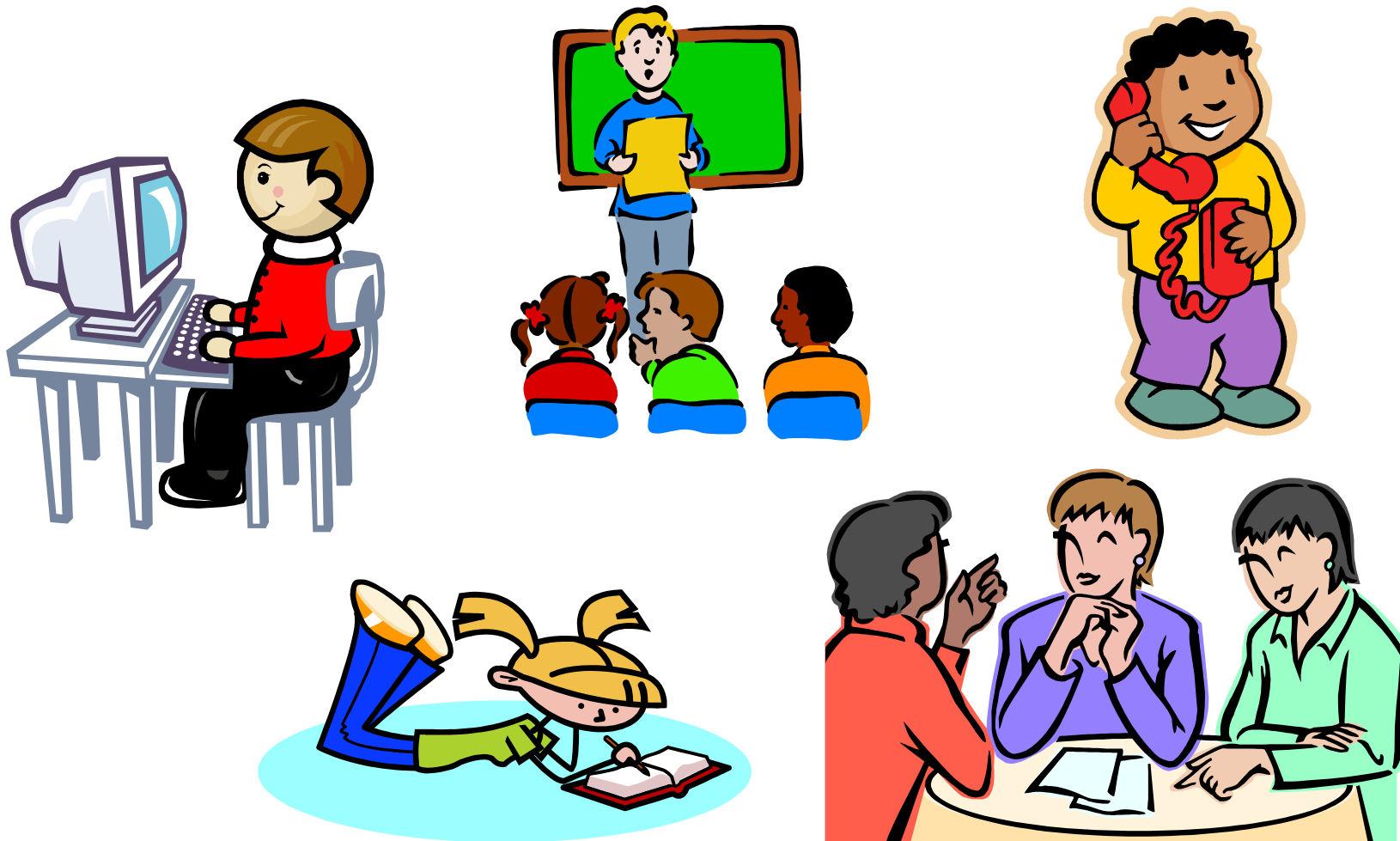
Meaning-focused input

- Mostly *known* language
 - “comprehensible input with $i + 1$ ”
- Listening and reading
- Individual and interactive

Meaning-focused input

- Varied genres
 - Conversation, narration, information,
“sheltered” content instruction
- Different voices
 - Not just teacher and textbook
 - Films, broadcasts, newspapers, notes...

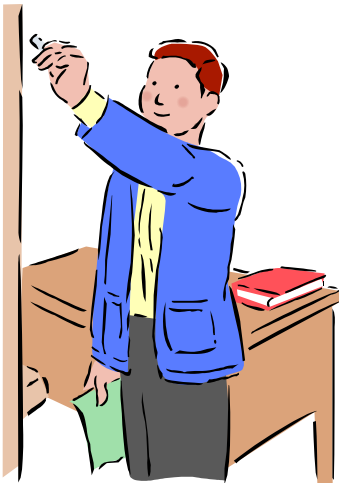
Meaning-focused output



Meaning-focused output

- Mostly *known* language
 - “stretching” and “noticing the gap”
- Speaking and writing
- Individual and interactive

Language-focused learning



Language-focused learning

- Always ***coordinated*** with meaning-focused activities.
- **ONE** of ***FOUR*** elements of language learning.

Language-focused learning

- Metalinguistic explanation
- Structured input
- Intensive reading
- Feedback
- Exercises & pattern practice
- Dictionary work
- Strategy training (learning to learn)

Four Strands in Language Teaching

Meaning-focused input

Meaning-focused output



Language-focused learning

Fluency development

What is fluency?

- Rapid, automatic performance that requires little (or no?) cognitive *effort*
- *Not* just speaking. Fluency is also important for listening, reading, and writing

How is fluency acquired?

- By repetitive use of **known language** for expressing or understanding **meaning**
 - **Not** through decontextualized drill.
 - Not through “difficult” communication

Fluency development



Fluency development activities

- Skits, plays, questionnaires, songs
- Reading or listening to material with *predictable, repetitive* content
- Reading or listening to *easy* stories, books, newscasts, weather reports
- *Repeated* reading or listening
- Games, math questions & formulas
- 4-3-2 reports

Why is fluency development important?

- For effective communication
 - But it is not only a goal of learning.
 - It also *motivates* learning.
 - Using “easy” language contributes to a *sense of success* leading to...
- ✓ **COMMUNICATIVE CONFIDENCE**

- More important...
 - Fluency *promotes new learning* by conserving cognitive resources.

Four Strands in Language Teaching

Meaning-focused input

Meaning-focused output



Language-focused learning

Fluency development

Four Strands in Language Teaching

- Equal attention to all four
- From the beginning

My “great expectations”

- Dialogue between researchers & teachers
- More research *in* the classroom
- Recognition of “local” knowledge
- Open minded policy-makers, educators, parents
- Making research findings accessible for teachers and teacher educators

- Thank you...
 - Questions?
- More questions?
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