

PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING PRONUNCIATION TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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ANNOTATION

Previous facts, this qualitative study aims at introspecting the role of explicit instruction for the teaching of pronunciation to young learners in ten primary schools in Pérez Zeledón. To gather meaningful data, questionnaires, structured observations and artifact collection were some of the instruments used. Language teachers were the main informants in this study. After results were obtained and analyzed, researchers decided to suggest a deductive model to teach vowel sounds pronunciation to primary school learners that follows key principles of the experiential approach.

Keywords: young learners, pronunciation, deductive approach, experiential approach, deductive instruction.

INTRODUCTION

English is a worldwide spoken language, and every day the number of people interested in learning it increases. Costa Rica is not the exception. English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning dates back to the 19th century. It was in 1825 when the Executive Power enforced a law to include it in the curriculum at Casa de Enseñanza (Córdoba, Coto and Ramírez, 2005, p.3). From that time on, the curriculum has been improved many times. It has always searched for making students able to communicate in English as comprehensible as possible. However, some students are not able to establish a fluent conversation using the target language after six years of exposure in primary school and five more years in high school. There are people who blame the school system and the curriculum itself. Other experts identify teachers as the main cause. Indeed, government authorities claim that the main problem regarding this burden is that some educators start teaching without a desired proficiency (Mora, 2011, n.p). Other arguments are directed toward monotonous non-authentic classes. EFL teachers may pay some attention to pronunciation, but it is necessary to identify to what extent it is approached in class, specifically at the primary school level. Educators in public education are guided by a syllabus that outlines key principles; however, specific frameworks are not decreed. They can make their own choices regarding class instruction as long as they follow the topics, approach and functions.

2. Literature Review This paper covers an exploration of theoretical contributions about general principles when teaching children, the role of explicit pronunciation instruction and experiential learning.

2.1. Teaching English to Young Learners Teaching English as well as any other language represents a big challenge and requires not only effort and creativity but also time and dedication. Being a language teacher is not an easy task. There are many factors that determine the way a class needs to be addressed. One of those aspects, and a very important one, is the kind of population taught. Teaching adults II Congreso de Lingüística Aplicada Effective Teaching Practices: The Key to Maximizing Learning 54 and children imply different processes. Piagetian and Vygotskian

theories contribute to understand the world of children and how they function in their surroundings. Piaget viewed the idea of the child as an active learner and thinker, and a sense maker. Children identify intentions and purposes in what people around them do, they tend to make sense of other's behaviors and even language. He saw the child as an active learner alone in the world. They see the opportunities for learning the world gives them. On his part, Vygotsky identified the child as a social being. He believed that they learn and develop as a consequence of the social context. He constructed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept which helps frame the teaching of foreign languages. The importance of this term is described by Cameron (2001) "the idea that the adult tries to mediate what next it is the child can learn; this has implications in both lesson planning, and in how teachers talk to pupils minute by minute" (p.8). Additionally, routines play a key role in the classroom since they give room to progressive learning of words and sounds. Language improvement takes place when the child takes control over the social encounters with peers and adults. Understanding their world is key to maximizing their opportunities. As Linse (2005) noted "there are many ways to learn about children's development and interests. Observing children both in and out of the classroom is a good way" (p.7); they have favorite games, TV shows and toys that can be taken to the class. Surveying for information is a tool to tailor instruction too. Brown (2001) established a clear difference among three main groups when teaching a foreign language: children, teenagers and adults. He noted that the former group possesses a spontaneous peripheral attention to forms, has a short attention span, needs to have all five senses stimulated and is focused on the "here and now" (pp.87-90). The Critical Period Hypothesis holds the argument that older learners can never achieve the same levels of achievement as young ones do. Age has strong effects that according to immersion studies, youngsters who seem to pay more attention to sound and prosody are more attentive to word order. They are generally less able to give prolonged attention (Cameron, 2001, p. 15). That is why the amount and type of exposure play a meaningful role when addressing kids. Meaningful experiences have a deeper impact and leads to stronger.

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