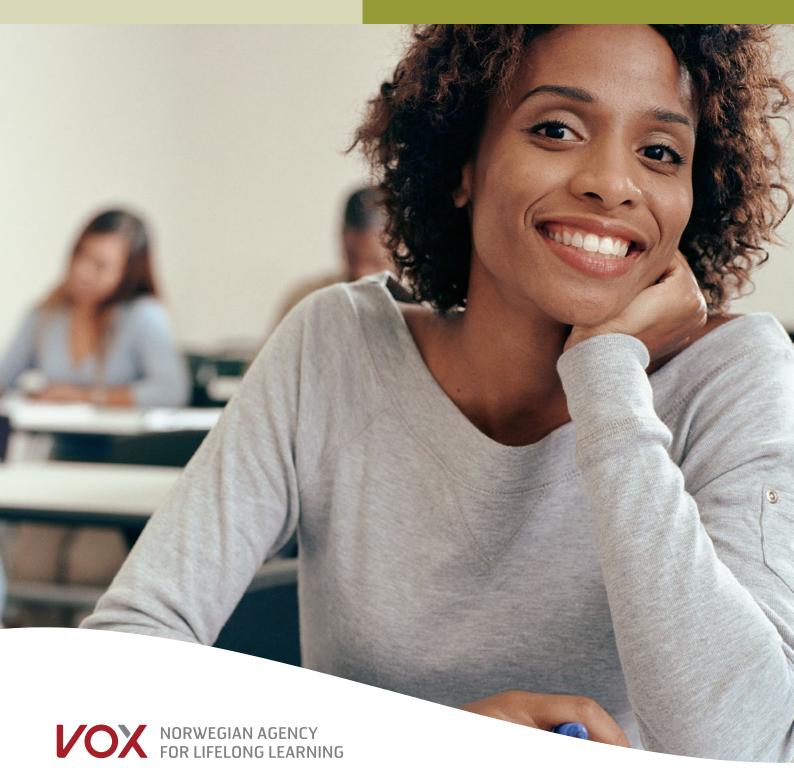# Guide to Methods

The Oral Approach to Language Learning

Guide to methods – The Oral Approach to Language Learning

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Contents

The Oral Approach to Language Learning

This article focuses on didactic challenges and how to practically structure learning activities so that participants use language as much as possible in the learning space. The article is thus not about how individuals learn orally or about the learning process itself.

Many participants do not speak much Norwegian outside school before they begin working. This is why it is important to exploit this arena most effectively. We will give you several practical tips on how to adapt your teaching and engage the participants, so that they all find a place where they can use their voice. There are many ways of achieving this, but most learning theory emphasises the value of participants working together.

Specific tips for exercises for oral learning activities for groups are presented in a separate article at the end of this PDF.

In this article you can read about
  • verbal skills
  • didactic challenges
  • tools
  • changing your teaching

You will also find a comprehensive bibliography and recommended reading list for both articles at the end of the PDF.

Links to the curriculum

The curriculum highlights the importance of verbal language in the alphabetisation module in particular, as well as how use of verbal and written language must go hand in hand. However, verbal skills are equally important to all participants in Norwegian language training. Verbal skills are at the heart of all communication and are at least equally important as written skills in all assessment levels.

According to Professor Ted Glynn, a stronger oral approach to language learning is one of the keys to success in learning to read and write a second language. (Glynn, 11 September 2012)

Learners who have little or no schooling have difficulty acquiring equally good verbal skills as those with a higher education. The learning process takes longer, and there is a risk of the language stabilising too early. One of several possible solutions is to reinforce verbal language by varying the input (volume, source and intensity) and by using varied methods of instruction. A good verbal foundation is not only a prerequisite for learning to read and write a new language, but also for participation at every level of society.

Developing verbal skills

Learning a language is not only a matter of motivation, ability and background, it also depends on the social and linguistic environment in which the language training is provided. One of the main principles of language training is use of language together with others (Swain 1995 and Painter

1985 in Gibbons 2010). Rich and varied contact with the language, opportunities for creative and exploratory language use in social interactions and balanced emphasis on linguistic form are criteria for good language training.

Learning to speak a new language also entails learning a skill. Today all theories and perspectives on learning concentrate on active and meaningful participation. No one today believes that skills are learned through a transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student. For an individual to develop language, the participant must be active and construct their own learning, regardless of their educational background. The participant must focus and reflect on the linguistic form of the language he or she uses and encounters.

Developing verbal skills is an eternal process. Early on in the course of training, the training is characterised by learning sounds, basic vocabulary and simple structures. Later the person develops a good, adapted (necessary) vocabulary and more complex structures. At a higher level, there is a desire to perfect both pronunciation and syntax in order to be as comfortable as possible during the conversations one participates in. The goal is to be able to express one's opinion, and to understand what others say. Listening and understanding are practised by receiving input from varied sources, but also by having to answer questions and communicate with others. People often understand more complex language than they are able to produce themselves.

The oral approach to language learning often distinguishes between content or communicative-oriented teaching and structure or form-oriented teaching. During communicative exercises and authentic conversations, participants test hypotheses about language and develop the ability to speak the language. In structure or form-oriented teaching, the emphasis is on practising and understanding the correct forms and structures to use.

Teaching verbal skills is completely different to teaching pronunciation. Pronunciation teaching is a separate field, and is about how to pronounce sounds in Norwegian – i.e. it has a phonological and phonetic perspective on the language. The oral approach to language learning places emphasis on practising and being able to use language to perform linguistic acts, in other words both express one's wishes and participate in conversations with others. I do not address pronunciation teaching in this article, but Huseby, Kløve, Andlem Harnes[1] and Strandskogen have written books and articles on this topic. The CALST pronunciation program that was recently developed at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology may be a helpful tool for pronunciation training.

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1 Harnæs, Liv Andlem (2004) Uttale og uttaleopplæring i norsk som andrespråk (Pronunciation and pronunciation training in Norwegian as a Second Language) In Selj, Elisabeth, Ryen, Else and Lindberg, Inger (Eds.) Med språklige minoriteter i klassen: Andrespråkslæring og andrespråksundervisning (Linguistic minorities in the class: Learning and teaching a second language), pp. 215–230 Oslo, Cappelen Akademisk Forlag

Didactic challenges while teaching

Learning environment

The teacher has great power, and is the person who plans activities in the classroom. The teacher is responsible for offering participants a safe and rewarding learning environment, with room for ample linguistic experimentation.

Participation

A safe learning environment is a prerequisite for adults engaging and participating in learning activities. It is also crucial that it is meaningful. Adults are selective learners, and we want to learn things that we believe are useful to us. Why should we participate in conversations and discuss issues if we do not think they have anything to do with us? We sign up for courses we want to attend, and we pull out if we do not think that they are relevant enough. When the teaching is organised so that the communication is authentic, and participants use their own skills, this generates interest and meaningful learning, as well as active learners who participate in their own learning process. Authentic and meaningful participation are particularly important to adults.

Independent learning

Adult participants also need to construct and take responsibility for their own learning by being active. Independent learning is meaningful learning. Independent learning is about taking an active part in one's own learning, and not just being a passive recipient.

Buddy learning

We often learn more from friends and classmates than from our teacher, and we learn more from those in our nearest development zone. When peers learn from and with each other, they can provide support and reflection, and challenge each other on the same level. Trying things out and discussing issues in a small, safe learning group creates less stress and fear of taking part, and greater safety and participation. More people dare to ask questions and try out their knowledge. Participants give each other direct and immediate feedback, argue, reflect and refresh their knowledge while discussing issues and in conversation with each other. When they have discussed questions posed by the teacher and issues with their peers before presenting the answer to the whole class, far more people will have participated in constructing knowledge. At the same time, each participant gets more time to talk. With buddy learning, the participants not only learn about the subject and communication, but they also learn to work together, listen to each other and help each other. Using each other systematically when learning is therefore a particularly good didactic measure.

Expectations

Many participants are motivated, and have a strong desire to learn the language of the new country. They can have great expectations for their own language learning. Learning Norwegian is a win-win situation for everyone. Inefficient learning behaviour may nevertheless create obstacles to

language development. Both previous and current negative learning experiences can impact on the learning outcome. A sense of achievement creates positive and good learning experiences, but simply believing in one's own abilities is not always enough. The teacher's expectations of the participant are also important in terms of the learning outcome. The teacher must have clear but realistic expectations of each participant. When participants have a chance to show what they know, experience achievement and are taken seriously, they become more motivated to perform. Goal management, reflection on and assessment of own learning are good tools for defining expectations and learning outcomes.

Achievement

Having to learn a new language as an adult is a challenge for most people. Merely speaking the global language English when one is not used to doing so, not to mention striving to achieve correct British English intonation and pronunciation, can be a challenge. Those familiar but nevertheless foreign sounds are frightening enough. Participants must experience achievement in order to be motivated to try to learn. Adults who are learning a new language may feel infantilised, and may feel that the general prejudice and view that simple language is a sign of a simple mind applies to them. Participants must therefore feel confident and understand that all language learning begins at level 1, and that trial and error are a natural part of the process. The teacher must facilitate ample testing and opportunities to experience achievement in a safe setting, and support the participants in a mature and respectful manner.

Goal management and goal orientation

Goal management is an important term in cognitive learning theory. We are better learners when we know what we will learn. The older you are, the more achievement-oriented you become (Anderman 2002). In adult classes, attention to the participants' goal orientation can help the teacher improve the efficiency of the teaching and give the participants qualitative long-term learning.

The teacher's view of knowledge can be reflected in goal formulation. Consciously or subconsciously, both the teacher's and the learners' practice are based on learning objectives. The objectives can be linked to two different goal orientations – performance goals and achievement goals.

Learners with performance goals often view intelligence as something static and inalterable. In a classroom where performance goals are the norm, there may be an extra focus on doing well, scoring better than others and getting good grades. Errors are seen as signs of incompetence, and both learners and the teacher are concerned with comparing performance.

A person with performance goals will ask the following question: Are my abilities good enough? A person with achievement goals will ask the following question: How can I best improve my abilities and experience achievement? Errors suggest that the person has chosen a poor strategy, which can be changed. People with achievement goals focus on accomplishment and learning. Their intention is to improve their skills. An important element is also belief that one can work with intelligence, and that it increases if an effort is made (Dweck and Leggett 1988, Anderman et al. 2002). With achievement goals, learning success is defined as progress and improvement.

Effort, using errors in the learning process and the way one learns are more important than comparing learning outcomes.

Mentally focusing on achievement goals leads to better and deeper learning. Teachers should therefore help learners set achievement goals instead of performance goals, and view intelligence as something dynamic rather than static.

Reflection

Reflecting on and being aware of one's own learning processes is closely linked to goal management and assessment: What do I want to learn? How can I learn it? Have I learned it? How have I learned it? In conversation with each other, the participants can discuss and put their language learning into words. Despite little schooling, we see that they discuss both form and content, and develop a meta language for their own learning (Lindberg 2003).

Feedback

Feedback and formative assessment overlap each other and are closely linked. A change from summative to formative assessment practice (Black and Wiliam 1998) requires changes in the teacher's behaviour and way of thinking. Assessment may be said to be the most important part of a teacher's work. Many teachers focus on correction, and spend a great deal of time on this work. Feedback is one of the factors that most greatly impacts on learning outcomes (Hattie 2008), but when research also shows that feedback that is not goal-oriented can yield a negative learning outcome (Black and Wiliam 1998), it is important to know what sort of feedback has a positive effect. Learners should reflect on feedback and consequences, and use error analysis effectively together with their teacher. This makes correction work more rewarding for both the teacher and the learner. Assignments and tests that are corrected by a teacher can be instructive if they are actively used to achieve further learning, but as a summative assessment, where only the grade is looked at, they are not a very useful way of improving the level of learning. If the only feedback is in the form of grades, this can be demoralising (Black and Wiliam 1998). An emphasis on errors in the form of red lines throughout the written text and verbal interruptions and unconstructive correction of speech has little effect. The feedback must be constructive in order to promote learning.

Groups

The benefits of learning through interaction in groups is highlighted in all learning theory, while group work is not an automatic guarantee of a successful learning outcome. On the contrary, unstructured work in groups can be both demoralising, frustrating and destructive. Group work must be based on certain principles in order to ensure a good learning environment. Read more about this under "Using groups".

Which tools?

As mentioned, participants who have little or no schooling have difficulty acquiring equally good verbal skills as those with higher education. At the same time, verbal skills are critical in order to be able to learn to read and write. Teachers must therefore have a large and rich repertoire of methods, and be able to create language activities that give each participant ample opportunity to use the language.

Material and methods that are suited to the oral approach to language learning (beginner level) when there is no common language includes pictures, film, digital tools, objects, written and verbal texts, body language and gestures. Additionally, a particularly good tool for learning is "each other".

Pictures

Pictures are good tools, and are important in the oral approach to language learning. They are essential at the beginner level when there is no common spoken language. The teacher must consider what types of pictures to use in order to practise different uses of language. Pictures can have several functions (Wright 1993:17):
- to motivate the participant to take part
- to bring the context into the classroom
- to describe the object (This is a train.)
- to interpret (This may be a local train.)
- for subjective use (I like travelling by train.)
- to give hints or clues for answers to questions
- to stimulate and provide information that can be used in conversation, discussion and to tell stories

Talking about or using pictures

A distinction can be made between talking about and talking using a picture. To describe is to talk about. To talk using a picture is to use the picture subjectively, as a starting point for conversations on own experiences and to bring in other perspectives. We can describe what we see in the picture: What is this? It's Oslo, the capital of Norway. Or we can ask: Have you been to Oslo? What did you see there? What did you do? What was the weather like? Who did you visit? What did you like best? What did you like least? Do you want to go back? Why? Why not?

Finding the right picture

The type of picture to use depends on the goal of the activity it is to be used with. The same picture can be used at every level. The choice of picture should be linked to the purpose of the work; the assignment to be solved. Simplification is exaggerated concern for the participant. The participants are adults with cognitive and perceptive abilities, but with a different cultural background to the teacher.

Unambiguous, simple pictures are perfect for learning vocabulary and concepts. Complex pictures with several meanings are perfect for discussion and language development at every level of the training in order to allow creative language use and hypothesis testing. Highlight, show and use the many meanings instead of thinking of them as distracting or "wrong". Several possible interpretations

and several sides of the same issue help us develop a perspective and understanding. Let the participants pick the pictures themselves and bring their own ones, and let them talk about what they see.

An ideal picture has meaning, authenticity, variation, a whole and a context. Authentic pictures that the participant can identify with, and expressive pictures with several interpretations provide a sound foundation for language games and learning.

Using drawings

Researchers Victor Lowenfeld and W. Lambert Brittain published the book "Creativity and Mental Growth" in 1957. Much of their research is still applied. They believed that children are born with the ability to express themselves in pictures, and that if children are free to create, they will develop on several levels – emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially, aesthetically and creatively.

Drawing is not only about developing motor skills and gaining greater visual control, but also about many other processes. Drawing is communication, and part of children's form of expression. It can be said that the process of drawing is a form of visual language development. At the same time, the dialogue in the process is important; the children's conversation with themselves, the dialogue between children, and the dialogue between children and adults.

Drawings are not used systematically in adult education. There may be an untapped potential here. Drawing and telling stories while drawing can be both liberating and fun. For participants without schooling, using a pencil to colour and draw lines is also a good way to learn forming letters. Wright (1993) believes that drawings created by participants have a particularly good function when a person wants to express something individual and personal. The drawings do not need to be advanced – on the contrary. In his book, Wright shows how easy it is to learn how to make good, illustrative drawings. The pictures can be simple figures and lines. He points out that the joy in trying to draw is much more important than the picture being beautiful.

Varying picture use

Simple pictures are a good tool when their use is controlled, guided and goal-oriented. An example of such use is learning the names of food products.

Complex pictures are best for open and creative use, for example to explain, discuss, converse and express one's own opinions.

In mechanical use of pictures, the main emphasis is on grammatical categories or pronunciation exercises. Such practice is often teacher-led, and the teacher usually knows what the participant will answer. For example, the teacher asks: What is she doing? The participant answers: She is running.

In communicative use of pictures, the participants use the structures the teacher wants them to use, but the participant still has the opportunity to use the language more freely by guessing. An example is if the teacher only shows half of the picture (for example the torso), and asks: What is she doing? Then the participants must guess.

Simulated use of pictures is when a person uses pictures instead of objects. The participants sit in groups or pairs, for example, and have pictures of food face down in front of them. One participant

turns over a picture and asks: Do you like ice cream? The other one gives a fitting answer (yes, no, sometimes).

Realistic use of pictures can be in connection with a survey of the class. Everyone asks each other whether they like different types of food (different sheets for each participant).
The teacher collects the sheets, and draws up class statistics.

Five perspectives on language in pictures

Work with language linked to pictures can have different perspectives: Wright (1993) mentions five:
  • structures (e.g. tenses, subject, verb, object, questions)
  • vocabulary (e.g. for local environment and for people)
  • functions (e.g. niceties, describing things, expressing likes and dislikes)
  • situations (descriptions, writing a dialogue)
  • skills (listening: what is right and what is not?; reading: compare two texts about the same picture; writing: write a report about an event in the picture; talking: hide the picture and have the participants describe it from memory)

Pictures can also be used in other ways, for example by flashing the picture:
Briefly show the picture, and ask: What did you see? Let the participants guess and talk.
Such an exercise gives the participants a reason to discuss, talk and listen to each other's opinions and guesses.

Usually the teacher shows the picture, and asks the participants to describe what they see.
However, participants can also bring in their experiences and opinions and "talk using" the picture, as mentioned earlier, or be given exercises where they have to make up events in the past or future based on the picture. More examples:
  • The teacher shows a picture of their family or people she knows – the participants guess – the teacher gives the answer at the end.
  • The teacher shows several pictures of different paintings – the participants choose the one they 'want', where they want it (in the living room?) and state why.
  • The participants describe places or persons to each other, and guess where they are.

Conversation

The language that participants listen to or produce themselves can be divided into two categories: input and output. Input is often adapted speech (teacher talk) in language learning. In relation to understanding, knowledge of words is considered most important. In output and participants' own production, on the other hand, language learners try out linguistic structures and experiment with creating consistent linguistic structures (Crossly and McNamara 2010). In the oral approach to language learning, the opportunity to try out and use language is critical to learning progression. Traditional class dialogue, where the teacher asks a question and one participant at a time uses the language is time-consuming and ineffective. Facilitating creative language use where as many people as possible can practice their skills "verbally" improves the learning outcomes for more than only those who have good learning strategies and are already good at speaking up in groups.

Conversation as a text book

When learning Norwegian, participants generally learn two things. They must primarily learn to speak Norwegian, but they must also learn about Norwegian society, and their rights and responsibilities.

In collaborative dialogue and cooperation in small groups, participants can test their own hypotheses about the language, while also reflecting on their own language use and that of others. This draws their attention to aspects of the language that they would not otherwise have considered, and gives them a safe place to discuss and ponder. When elaborating on common issues, they e.g. discuss different solutions, argue, ask questions, and clear up misunderstandings. This will lead to a dramatic increase in linguistic negotiation and conversations about language. Knowledge about linguistic form is particularly useful when we include participants with little education (Lindberg 2000).

Lindberg (2000) highlights the importance of conversation, and talks about how we can use conversation as a text book.

Conversation is important at every level of the oral approach to language learning and has several functions at the same time: Conversation is
- a social activity
- a source of knowledge
- the most common way of using language (we even talk to ourselves)
- a relationship-builder
- an apparatus for training and developing verbal skills, reflections and cognitive skills

Conversation as a didactic tool

Participants cannot merely be put into a group and left to talk. Teachers must take some didactic steps. With the best intentions, and to avoid production of erroneous structures, teachers often use governed interaction (from behaviourism) and may unfortunately thus limit and stunt language development among participants.

The three Ps: Present – Practise – Produce and IRF: Initiation – Response – Feedback are signs of a mechanical view of communication (Gibbons 2010). In such practice, the teacher transfers and disseminates information, while the participant receives, saves and adapts it. Utterances that are produced to be grammatically correct for the teacher are called "edited speech". This is common practice in school.

The teacher asks control questions in order to check the participant's understanding. Control questions can be helpful, but are not enough. When the teacher asks ("guess what I am thinking"), the participant answers (guesses) and the teacher assesses the answer, the participant uses short answers, single words and phrases. This is not authentic language use. In order to ensure that the participant can transfer knowledge and use it independently and at will, free conversation is also necessary.

The three Ps are in contrast to free conversation. In free conversation, students learn to speak up, introduce topics, argue and use language in many functions that cannot be found in a regular IRF pattern. Conversation is not only a space in which to practise linguistic structures, it is also the foundation of syntactic development (Hatch 1978). Language development among participants progresses more rapidly when they use exploratory speech, not only edited speech (Barnes 1978).

The teacher usually asks many questions in the classroom, but the participants only answer half of them. As early as 1974 (Holley and King 1974 in Lindberg 2000), a study was conducted which found that simply giving students a few more seconds to answer would increase participation. If we include simple brainstorming in pairs before they have to answer, this gives everyone a chance to participate.

Asking good questions

The teacher must be aware of the type of questions she asks. Asking good, language-producing and reflective questions can lead to better language learning for all participants on every level (Cranton 2006). Example of teacher's question: What is the man doing? Answer: Walking. Or: Tell me what you see. What is happening here? A man is walking on the road. Where do you think he is going?

Tips from Cranton:
- Be specific and direct.
- Go from the general to the specific.
- Converse.
- Do not repeat the participants' answers to your questions.
- Authenticity is important. Try to achieve real communication and not brief responses to questions posed by the teacher.
- Delivering information as a response to a question from the teacher is unnatural language use and stunts language development.
- In versatile, natural language use, we propose, consider and negotiate interpretation and meaning. We express agreement, disagreement, find comprises, conclude, praise each other, thank, ask for and offer help.
- Do not ask yes/no questions if you want the participant to develop their language.
- Ask questions based on the experiences and interests of the participants, so that the conversation becomes meaningful and relevant.

In regular authentic communication there are different "gaps", such as the information gap, opinion gap, and perception/understanding gap, that get us talking. Creating such gaps in the classroom provides a good starting point for authentic and meaningful discussions.

In everyday life we know what kind of differences and gaps we want to bring up and discuss. There must be a reason for us to become involved.

Using groups

Certain assessments are always necessary when preparing lessons. All teachers select and assess content and activity according to conscious and subconscious principles. It may be a good idea to reflect on these five questions (Wright 1993):
1. Is it easy to prepare the activity?
2. Is it easy to organise the activity in the classroom?
3. Is the activity of interest to the participants?
4. Is the activity meaningful and authentic?
5. Does the activity expand language use?

The answer to all of these questions should be yes. One tool for basing the teaching on these principles could be structured group work.

The use of groups can be championed based on several perspectives. First, it is a skill (the subject) – the participants will learn the verbal language. Second, the participants are adults, and must be able to contribute their own experiences and knowledge. Third, use of groups is an effective way for the teacher to steer the teaching.

There are many ways of learning in interaction with others, or didactic ways of organising learning in groups. Here we mention just three of them:
1.   the Jigsaw Puzzle exercise
2.   learning together (or collaborative learning)
3.   structured work in groups

These three methods are simple, and are particularly suited to learning activities in Norwegian language teaching.

1 The Jigsaw Puzzle

The Jigsaw Puzzle exercise is excellent for groups and for learning skills. The Jigsaw Puzzle was first used in Austin, Texas in 1971 by Professor of Psychology Elliot Aronson to prevent an explosive situation and chaos the first time white, Afro-American and Latin-American youths were gathered in the same classroom.

The teacher creates a table, listing the participants in the different groups. The participants must be able to see the table. In Norwegian as a Second Language for adults, the table can be drawn directly on the board when the teacher sees who is present on that exact day. Remember to leave the table in sight, if possible with the day's learning objectives. A table layout can also be used if the Jigsaw Puzzle structure is not used. Such a table gives a clear picture of the classroom, roles can be assigned, and it is possible to vary who works with whom in an effective and efficient way. Such a table is a good aid for substitute teachers. The teacher can use the participants' names right away, which gives them a good command of the class.

If the teacher usually hands out a schedule for the day, it may be a good idea to include the group table in the plan. This requires stable attendance by the students. A table layout also shows who is doing what.

Another way of dividing the groups is to hand out small balls (e.g. in five different colours, with four of each in a group of twenty) or stickers, or to use other objects to show which group the students are in. You can see an example of how to use the Jigsaw Puzzle in teaching here. In order to have a good command of the class and always know who will work together when using the Jigsaw Puzzle exercise, it is a good idea to use a table layout, as shown below.

The gender distribution may be different in the different classes. Sometimes it is better that there are no women in a group rather than there being only one woman in a group when the rest are men. Two men and two women in a group can be good, but sometimes it can also be convenient to have groups that are purely divided by gender.

Homogeneous mother tongue groups can be used when more than two participants have the same mother tongue. When it is important for the participants to understand the content of texts and concepts, or when working with subjects related to the country they come from, or the language and culture, using the mother tongue can be a useful tool and support. Those who know the most can explain things to others, and be a resource for those who know less. You can read more about use of the mother tongue in the article "Morsmål som støtte i opplæringen" (Mother tongue as a teaching resource).

Heterogeneous groups where "no one" has the same mother tongue can be used for pure language training where the purpose of the activity is to use, strengthen and automate the language.
In schools with few participants in the classes, it may be a good idea to work in pairs and switch pairs several times a day (if there are at least four participants), so that knowledge is transferred among pairs instead of in groups.

Table layout for the Jigsaw Puzzle exercise

The participants can of course be divided into the categories one wants, and groups can be divided both vertically and horizontally. Here are some suggestions:

Division by level:				
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
1	High performers	High performers	High performers	High performers
2	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate
3	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate
4	Low performers	Low performers	Low performers	Low performers

Division by language and gender (M=Male, F=Female):				
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
1	Turkish M	Turkish F	Turkish F	Turkish F
2	Somali F	Somali M	Somali F	Somali F
3	Urdu F	Urdu F	Urdu M	Urdu F
4	Urdu F	Farsi F	Arabic F	Turkish M
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
1	Turkish F	Farsi F	Somali F	Urdu F
2	Somali F	Turkish F	Urdu F	Farsi F
3	Macedonian F	Urdu F	Turkish F	Turkish F
4	Urdu M	Somali M	Arabic M	Turkish M

Example of a layout for a daily schedule:				
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
1	Abdi	Nader	Marek	Jamil
2	Chaima	Stanislav	Juliusz	Tatiana
3	Marian	Safia	Supattra	Elisabeth
4	Elham	Lourdes	Khonow	Faisa

Another way of creating Jigsaw Puzzle groups is to assign participants numbers 1 to 4, colours or letters (labels are a good idea) so that there are groups with the same number, colour etc. in one group, and then so that the participants have different numbers, colours etc. in the group. (See also the Jigsaw Puzzle.)

2 Collaborative learning – learning together

Learning together means that the learners work together to achieve the same learning outcome, and that each person can only achieve the learning outcome if the others also achieve their outcome (Johnson and Johnson 1999) (Haugaløkken et al. 2006; David W. Johnson et al. 2001). With this model, particular emphasis is placed on social skills, process assessment, dependency, responsibility and interaction.

- positive mutual dependency – the participants are under an obligation to contribute to their own learning and that of the others
- individual responsibility for oneself and the group
- face-to-face interaction – the participants must share resources, help each other, praise and encourage each other, and give academic and personal support
- use of social skills – the participants must learn or improve necessary social skills (make decisions, exercise leadership, build trust, communicate and solve conflicts)
- process assessment – the participants must analyse and reflect on the work in the group in order to increase the efficacy of the group

This way of working is best when regular long-term groups are needed (this is common in higher education). Read more about this in my article "Korleis gjekk det med Abdou? – Samarbeidslæring som verkemiddel for å betre læringsmiljøet for studentar med norsk som andrespråk" (How did things turn out for Abdou? – Collaborative learning as a tool for improving the learning environment of students with Norwegian as a Second Language) at Uniped.

3 Structured work in groups

Spencer Kagan (1994) has collected many collaborative structures or patterns for work in groups. The structures are based on four specific principles (PIES):
- Positive interdependence/ties
    - ° Can anyone achieve this on their own? The answer here should be no. Everyone must learn, and everyone must help the others learn.
- Individual accountability
    - ° Are individual presentations required from each member of the group? The answer should be yes. This is the main difference between structured work in groups and traditional group work.
- Equal participation
    - ° How equal is the participation? Everyone must perform specific tasks that help the group solve its tasks.
- Simultaneous interaction
    - ° What percentage of the participants are active at the same time? The more who are active, the better.

How do you change your teaching?

It takes a lot for teachers to change their practices. Dylan Wiliam (2007) believes that the past 30 years have shown that teachers change their thoughts on teaching, but not their practices. Wiliam asserts that teachers know what steps they can take to change their practices, but making the changes is more difficult than knowing what is right. He believes that the best way of achieving change is for teachers to work together in small groups and to discuss experiences with experiments and share good ideas. Lectures are suited to increasing one's own understanding, but groups are best for changing practices. The teaching will not change unless the teacher is committed, say Hargreaves and Fullan (2003), but they also warn against shallow, partial or counter-productive forms of collaboration. Using the action plan in Wiliam (2007) can therefore be helpful for making changes:
1. Imagine a single change you want to make.
    - What results do you expect from this change?
2. What kind of changes do you need help with?
    - What kind of help do you need?

3.   What other changes do you want to make later on in the year?
    • What kind of help will you need?
4.   What do you want to do differently or stop doing in order to implement the changes?

Find one or more colleagues to work with. Complete the action plan. Set aside time, and make sure that you do what you have planned. Stick to the deadlines, and support each other. Reflecting together, collaborating and learning in a good practical fellowship is rewarding, and takes you forward. Support and a sense of community make people more willing to try new things (Hargreaves & Fullan 2003).

Speaking exercises in groups

This section presents some examples of simple collaborative exercises and group exercises. The film clips show some of them in use.

Using the different exercises gives the participants the opportunity to speak much more Norwegian than in ordinary classroom teaching. Unfortunate rigid patterns can quickly establish themselves when participants talk to the same people every time. By using the different ways of creating ad hoc groups as modelled by the trainer, the participants get to talk to many more people, which creates greater variation in the conversations and makes them more challenging.

Groups and second language teaching

Learning in interaction with others and using groups is not a special technique, but a holistic teaching method with many different solutions. Relying on pedagogical and psycholinguistic arguments, experts in methods have been recommending groups in second language classrooms for years:
  • The participants' language skills are improved by other people than the teacher, there is greater variation and more input.
  • The participants interact more with each other, which also increases their output. They receive much variation and repetition.
  • The participants feel greater responsibility for making themselves understood and take more responsibility for their own learning.
  • What participants hear and learn is linked. The language is used in a meaningful way with a specific intent.
  • The information is expressed in different ways, and the participants ask questions, exchange ideas, solve problems and repeat words, thoughts are formed, and opinions are corrected in context. All of this increases understanding.
  • It is easier for the teacher to ask relevant and authentic questions when participants have to find information on their own and explain what they mean. The communication thus becomes more authentic than in traditional classroom teaching, where the teacher asks questions, and only a few participants answer if they can.
  • It is safer to discuss with one's peers in order to identify an answer than to have to answer individually.
  (Gibbons 2010: 39–40)

Both the learners themselves and the teachers can be sceptical towards extensive use of 'uncontrolled' language use between fellow learners. This concern is unjustified (Long and Porter 1985):

The learners
  • spend more time talking to other learners than with mother tongue speakers
  • make the same number of errors regardless of whom they talk to
  • have the same number of corrections as mother tongue speakers
  • ask for help equally often/seldom, regardless of whether they are talking with mother tongue or target language speakers

At the same time, mother tongue speakers seldom correct each other, and learners rarely correct each other. Mother tongue speakers complete each others' sentences equally often, but learners complete the sentences of other learners five times more often than the sentences of mother

tongue speakers. Learners thus receive more conversational practice when conversing with other learners.

In this study, the researcher concluded that even though learners could not give each other grammatical and sociolinguistic input on the same level as they received from mother tongue speakers, they gave each other an opportunity for genuine communicative practice and negotiations regarding meaning. Several researchers support this finding, and point out that second language speakers use a more exploratory and varied language in conversation with other second language speakers than with mother tongue speakers of the target language. (Crossley and McNamara 2010).

Group division

A group may consist of anything from two persons to a whole class. Switching between teaching and learning activities in pairs, small groups and whole classes makes the learning environment more active and dynamic.
Groups can be divided according to the following criteria:
- level
- abilities
- interests
- culture and language
- gender

I prefer to divide people into new groups every day, often several times a day. It is easy to do this using the table layout (see page 15) or with exercises like the Line (1) or the Resource Corner (2). Also other exercises like Find a Partner (3), the Doughnut (4) and Ask and Switch (5) are good for varying pairs.

Examples of exercises and film clips

Here I will present some group divisions and exercises. Six of the exercises have also been recorded. The participants in the film come from different groups and are not used to being in groups with each other. In addition, they have not used these exercises before. I would like to thank the participants involved and Oslo VO Rosenhof for their kind help. Link: http://www.vox.no/Norsk-og-samfunnskunnskap/norsktrening/#ob=13013. (Norwegian voice over).

1 The Line
The participants stand on a line and find their place by asking the others questions and answering questions. Here are examples of topics and questions that can be asked. It is a good idea to ask questions related to the topic the class is working with.
- What is your name? (alphabetic)
- When were your born? (year/date)
- How long have you lived in Norway?
- When did you come to Norway?
- How much Norwegian did you speak yesterday?
- How far do you have to travel to school?
- How far is it to the country you come from?
- How often do you go to the shops?
- How many ... do you have?

The teacher indicates where the line begins: A starts here, or the lowest/highest number starts here.

Ad hoc group with the Line exercise

When the participants line up according to how long they have lived in Norway, or how often they train per week, the ones standing next to each other become conversational partners (2–4 people). The teacher can decide whether she wants groups of people with similar experiences or with as disparate experiences as possible. When the Line is "folded", the people with different experiences end up in the same group.

Here you can see a film of the exercise. The Line.

2 The Resource Corner
- The participants line up in different parts of the classroom according to the teacher's "selection criteria" (three or four different ones – e.g. favourite seasons, different pictures, abilities, professions, news, topics, words or other categories).
- The participants discuss the subject, talk about why they chose that place to stand, find arguments for or against a topic for example, converse about the subject and use the vocabulary they have practised.
- The groups can talk about or make presentations to each other on what they talked about in the Resource Corner, in a plenary discussion or in a group statement.

Alternative: Resource persons make up the Resource Corner, and the other participants go around collecting information from the resource persons.

Ad hoc groups with the Resource Corner exercise
- If we define four corners as having four different topics, the persons who know something about these topics, or the ones who want to learn about these topics can go to the different corners.
- There can be resource persons in each corner. Three to four persons in the class with special knowledge of a subject (for example what country they come from, the news of the day, an activity or anything else) can be resources in each corner. The rest of the class chooses the 'corner' they want to learn more about.
- The participants in a group can also go to separate resource persons, and then back to the group to tell the others what they have learned, or they can freely circulate and talk to all of the resource persons.

Here you can see a film of the exercise. Resource Corner.
The purpose of the exercise is to facilitate that participants speak to others than those sitting next to them, ensuring that they are paired up with as many speaking partners as possible.

3 Find a Partner
- All of the participants stand up and find a partner.
- The teacher gives the participants a conversation exercise.
- The pair talks together for a couple of minutes.
- Then the teacher claps her hands, and everyone changes partner.

The participants can have the same topic, or they can switch topic after changing partner a couple of times.

Instead of clapping, the teacher can raise her hand when the time is up. As the participants notice that the teacher has raised her hand, they stop talking and do the same. When everyone is quiet, they will be instructed to find a new conversation partner and a new topic.

Here you can see a film of the exercise. Find a Partner.

4 The Doughnut

- The participants stand in two concentric circles, facing each other in pairs.
- The teacher gives them an exercise.
- When they have finished the exercise, the teacher instructs the outer circle to move to the right or left to the next participant or past a given number of participants.

The exercise can be used to talk about today's topic and to practise vocabulary, grammatical structures or discussion exercises.

Examples of exercises: Tell each other what you do to stay in shape. Tell each other what you had for breakfast today. Or the participants ask/interview each other: What did you do yesterday? What are you wearing today? When were your born? What is your address? Feel free to use discussion exercises and questions from the text book.

The Doughnut can also be used to repeat the day's vocabulary with picture cards or to talk about the picture.

Here you can see a film of the exercise. The Doughnut.

5 Ask and Switch

- The participants stand on the floor, holding a picture card.
- They find a partner, tell them what is in the picture, and ask them questions like: I have a bag. What do you have? Or they talk about their own picture first, and then the other person's picture.
- When both of them have talked about their pictures, asked questions, answered or described what they see in the picture, they swap cards with each other and find a new partner.

Partners can be switched by the teacher clapping her hands to gain everyone's attention or raising her arm, as described in exercise 3 Find a Partner.

6 Rapid Robin

- The participants work in pairs and say a word or sentence each within a topic/antonym/synonym/grammatical category
- Then they switch partner, and repeat the process.

Speed is important, and they can switch partner as many times as is natural, based on the exercise.

Here you can see a film of the exercise. Rapid Robin.

7 Talking Around the Table

- Four to five participants sit around each table. The teacher asks a question that can have many answers, for example: What do you know about…? What do you see in the picture? What sort of furniture do you have in your living room? What have you learned today?
- Or the question can be about days, months, numbers, ordinal numbers etc. Start in different places – backwards, alternately etc.
- Each participant around the table answers in turn.
- When someone cannot think of an answer, they say pass, and wait until the next round.

Speed is important.

Here you can see a film of the exercise. Talking Around the Table.

8 One for All

- The participants are divided into groups of 3–4, and assign each other numbers from 1 to 3 or 1 to 4.
- The teacher shows a picture, and asks the participants to say what they see, asks a question or gives them an exercise from the text book, grammar book or other text. She can also use the participants' background knowledge as a starting point.
- The participants discuss, come to an agreement, and make sure that everyone in the group can answer.
- The teacher says a number, and one participant with that number answers.

Participants from other groups with the same number can elaborate on the answer, or everyone with the same number can answer if there are group-specific answers.

9 Think – Share – Present

- The participants think individually about a question posed by the teacher.
- The participants share their thoughts in pairs.
- The participants share their thoughts in new pairs, groups or with the whole class (see Group Statement).

10 Group Statement

- The participants must complete a sentence, such as:
- I believe that... Food is... School is... If I want to speak Norwegian well, I need to... Smoking is... At the flea market... At the chemist... Love is... The most important part of raising a child is...
- They then share their thoughts with each other and agree on a joint statement, which one member of the group presents to the whole class.

A group statement can also be the conclusion of the work in, for example, the Think – Share – Present exercise.

11 Copy Me

- The participants have the same series of pictures or the same pictures. They work in pairs, with their backs to each other, or with a barrier between them, so that they cannot see each other's pictures.
- One participant places his/her pictures in a system and explains it to the others, who try to place their pictures the same way.
- They compare them.

12 Same or Different

- The participants have different pictures.
- They ask each other what is in their picture, and tell them what they have.
- They compare them.
-

Another version of this activity is that one of the participants describes their picture, and the other one tries to draw the picture being described.

13 Debate

- The participants are given a statement to debate.
- The teacher assigns opinions for and against.
- Each person finds arguments in support of their opinion and shares them with people with the same opinion.
- Everyone practises arguing in favour of their opinion.
- Representatives of the two perspectives meet to debate.

- The participants switch perspective.
- The participants agree on a shared group opinion (exercise 10 Group Statement).

This is an excellent exercise for debates such as for or against smoking, flea markets etc. Participants may be biased and creative, in fact this is encouraged. As the teacher decides who should think what, and people must then change their opinion and use each others' arguments, this is a safe and fun way of practising argumentation and expanding one's own perspectives.

14 The Jigsaw Puzzle (also see page 14)

- Divide the participants into Jigsaw Puzzle groups (horizontal and vertical groups) of 4 (out of a class of 16 participants).
- Make one of the participants the leader, if necessary.
- Divide the assignment into four. If the participants are, for example, supposed to learn about the seasons, each group will be assigned a season. They can also be given the same exercise, such as the names of food products, but the process is the same.
- Let the participants first work individually and write down what they know about the seasons or give them material, or let them find material about the seasons themselves.
- The participants with the same season then tell each other what they have learned. They must all share their information and knowledge, one at a time. They will note what is missing. Let the participants practise talking about the seasons in the expert group (explain which group it is), so that they are prepared for the next information process.
- The participants will move to the next group, and will explain what they have learned about their season, one at a time. The others will take notes and ask questions.

The teacher can end with a group or individual test or a quiz, let the participants write a text about their favourite season for instance, or let the group create a shared project.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

The originator of TPR is Professor of Psychology James J. Asher.
This is a method that can be particularly relevant in the oral approach to language learning. A few minutes with such activities and similar ones at the beginning, as a break or at the end, can be positive, and a good way to take advantage of the time available. Norwegian-language teaching materials have not been developed yet, but we can get an idea of what to do by looking at the English versions.

In TPR, the teacher or some of the participants are models. Those who are not models observe and repeat. TPR can take several forms.

A simple process

1. The teacher visualises a number of statements (or uses pictures or other artefacts) whilst describing what she is doing. She repeats the movements a few times in the same order, and it is clear what she wants to say.
2. The teacher must not correct the linguistic production of the participants during this phase.
3. The participants observe, listen and repeat the movements; i.e. they mimic. They eventually repeat the sentences. The teacher stops talking and only shows the movements. The participants say what the teacher is doing. Finally the teacher changes the order of the movements or puts them together in different ways while the participants say what the teacher is doing out loud. The teacher starts with one-word instructions and expands to short sentences. Humour and slightly unexpected and strange requests should be used in order to create a good atmosphere. It is positive for the learning process that the participants focus more on what they are doing than what they say.

Examples of instructions

To the whole group:
- Stand up.
- Sit down.
- Point at the table. Go to the table. Touch the table.
- Point at the chair. Go to the chair. Touch the table.
- Pick up the paper. Put the paper on the table.

Then to individual participants:
- Nadia, get up, go to Faisa, and tap her on the shoulder.
- Faisa, go to Ali, and touch his chair.
- Raj, go to the chair, pick up the chair, and put it on the table.

It is a good idea to use surprising sentences and funny perspectives. Otherwise the participants can easily become bored.

This method makes the way children learn a first language a model for adults learning a second language. It also activates the right half of the brain, not only the left one, which is the case with traditional language teaching. It is possible that the visual perception of the movements helps people store what they say in their long-term memory. The goal is for the teacher to say as little as possible, and for the participants to say as much as possible.

This does not provide a complete picture of the method, but shows an exciting way of working with verbal language skills. If you want to test the method, you can click on the link for TPRworld and the YouTube clip below to get an idea of how it works. You can also order good instructional DVDs online (here). Such methods help teachers increase the efficiency of the teaching, but it is my experience that the teachers themselves also create good versions of the methods and adapt them to their own needs and the way they like to work.

Here are many links to TPRworld.

Examples from Youtube.

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