

Increasing student output through interactive reading tasks

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*As part of the MoE PD Programme, Teacher Professional Development - Learning Languages Years 7 & 8 *, Doris conducted an action research project to see whether the use of interactive reading tasks would increase student use of German.*

Research Question:

Does the use of interactive reading tasks increase student output?

Motivation for Research:

After my first observation visit from the PD Project Director, Wendy Thomson, we drafted the following focus points for the next observation:

- less teacher talk, less intrusive and busy teacher
- more student talk, in pairs or groups
- more student-centred activities to free up the teacher.

I was looking for a different way of teaching, where I could provide opportunities for students to use German in meaningful contexts and communicate in pairs. I also wanted to create a less teacher-focused atmosphere, where I had time to listen to the individual students, to assess their learning and be a resource.

As a strong supporter of learning through interaction I took an interest in Fran Hunia's (1998) research on promoting Maori language through reading and interactive tasks, which I read as part of the course readings for the methodology paper. I decided to follow Hunia's model and translate readers and create reading cards for students to use working in pairs.

The participants were students in my Year 7 and Year 8 class at Springbank School, Kerikeri, Bay of Islands. The students have German for the whole year for one hour per week.

Implementation of Research:

I chose readers with simple words, sentence structures and grammatical forms. The books had carefully selected topics that students could relate to, had an interest in or had prior knowledge of, for example, birthdays, making pancakes, riding a bicycle, being locked out. While translating I had to alter the original text several times to simplify the German. I put the emphasis on repetition of words and simple phrases. I also kept the students' language abilities (Emergent Communication after about 25 hours of German Language lessons) in mind.

The content of the reading cards is based on Fran Hunia's interactive tasks. Each reading card begins with two oral pre-reading tasks such as colour and number revision in relation to the book. This provides instant language success for the students and motivates them.

The students read the readers and complete oral post reading tasks such as:

1. Richtig/Falsch/Korrigiere es (Yes/No/Make it right) (Nation, I.S.P., 1996, p. 65)
2. Was sagst du? (Say It! Grid)
3. The third task is a written task (time-line, flow-chart, comic strip, all with German title, captions, words, etc.) The students are still in pairs and can support each other, but each records his/her own work.

4. A final task is to choose three new words from the text, find out meaning, copy and learn them for the next day.

Data Collection Tools:

- Verbatim observations of two year 7 students recorded over a period of 20 minutes in Term 1, (22nd February) Data Collection Visit 1 (baseline data) and in Term 2, (21st June) Data Collection Visit 2 - by Wendy Thomson.
- Tape recording of the two year 7 students working on another reading card (8th June)
- Observations (anecdotal evidence) while observing all students working on interactive reading tasks in pairs during lesson using reading cards

Duration of Research:

The books and reading cards were be used over a six-week period, with 60 minutes each week over 2 days (40 minutes Day 1 to read and interact, 20 minutes Day 2 to reflect, share, follow up). The research is still on-going, but first outcomes and data analysis are encouraging.

Data analysis results:

	Student 1	Student 2
<i>Number of speech acts</i>		
Data Collection Visit 1	8	4
Data Collection Visit 2	25	20
Tape Recording	14	13
<i>Number of sentences</i>		
Data Collection Visit 1	2	2
Data Collection Visit 2	7	10
Tape Recording	11	11
<i>Number of new vocabulary</i>		
Data Collection Visit 1	0	0
Data Collection Visit 2	8	6
Tape Recording	8	8

The evidence showed pleasing improvement in students’ interactions, communication and especially output. The number of speech acts was three to five times higher in Visit 2 than in Visit 1. Both students used around five times more sentences when they talk.

The new books have provided the opportunity to learn six to eight new words from each book.

I am less intrusive as a teacher and ‘freed up’ to maximize focused input for individual students and to observe the progress of all of my students.

Conclusions

1. Comprehensible Input + 1 is achieved through well translated readers.
2. Reading is an important part of language learning and part of the curriculum and can and should be implemented from the beginning of second language instruction.

3. Students are motivated to read in German and enjoy reading aloud and making sense of words in meaningful contexts.
4. Students feel successful learners of German.
5. Reading cards in pairs push the language output and give students and their teacher opportunities to interact and communicate in the TL.
6. Reading cards are easy to create and adjust for the individual learner.
7. Role-plays could support the oral output.
8. While working on the cards I found several ways to improve them.
9. Corrected sentences should be written down by each student after the oral discussion.
10. Say- it- grid tasks need to be written in the first person singular (*Ich bin Papa. Was sage ich zu Mama?*) to make it clearer who is saying what.

To finish off my research and support the theories of pushed student output and interaction I would like to quote from Lightbown & Spada, 2003, p. 109:

“Communicative, content-based and task-based instructional environments ... (put) emphasis on **interaction, conversation and language use**, rather than on learning about the language”.

References:

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Nation, I.S.P.(1996) *Language Teaching Techniques*. Occasional Publication No.2 Victoria University of Wellington.

** Note: In 2006 this was a pilot programme in Northland and Auckland only. TPDL, as it is now known, commenced as a national contract in 2007.*