

THE 'RIPPLE-EFFECT APPROACH' TO TEACHING ENGLISH

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The teaching of English, as of other languages, is often addressed as separate skills – namely, speaking, listening, reading and writing, and then language - that do not speak to one another. This 'separatist' approach misses out on the importance of addressing the skills in an integrated manner, for example, teaching the one skill, **speech (oral)** in order to enhance the other, **written speech**. From our training as teachers, we have all been taught to address the various language skills as a unit, the enhancement of one leading to the development of others. However, most curriculum documents present the skills separately, thus creating an impression that the skills are independent. It then becomes 'normal' for us, teachers, to start teaching the skills in compartments, removed from one another. Learners follow our lead and see a written dialogue as different from an oral dialogue. The fact that the two are similar other than the mode and requirements set (a point which they must also acquire) is lost. Learners lose this point which should advance the acquisition of language skills. For First Additional Language learners, this association would hasten the 'aha' moment.

So where does the ripple effect feature in English teaching?

Dropping a pebble in a pool of water results in a ripple that affects every water molecule in the pool. This statement, for English teaching, implies that the first lesson could and should explode into a myriad of related activities. The texts such as speech, diary, essay, transactional, interviews and journal entry/newspaper report, film or book review, among others, can and should be founded on a mode other than writing. In each case, the reading and listening skills, and appropriate understanding and use of language, are interwoven. As a result, a deliberate attempt should be made to '*Remove the water-marked barriers in the teaching of English and other languages.*'

So, where do we drop the pebble?

Day 1 of each academic year starts with learner introduction. The first baby-step could be pair-work in which learners introduce each other to a peer. The peers then introduce each other to the class.

Where is the first ripple? The introduction inadvertently leads to an **interview** and **note-taking**. In order to introduce the peer, notes of what 'the interviewer' **thinks (opinion)** important will be written down and subsequently read from during the introduction. This is also the first demonstration of **reported speech**. The interviewer reports what the

interviewee said. At this early stage, the teacher could be noting the extent and depth (**baseline assessment**) to which he/she must go when teaching this aspect. Furthermore, learners could be developed at this early stage to take note of language use and its impact on the message communicated. The element of **bias** would be introduced as part of **critical language awareness**. The interviewer who has a good sense of humour will present the funny side of the interview, while the sober-minded one will present the more serious side of the interviewee. The interviewee could be called upon to confirm if all that was reported would have been emphasised were the interviewee reporting.

In concluding the day, the introduction, which is a result of the interview, can end up as a **newspaper report** in which the interviewer was introducing a celebrity, or a member of a team. Furthermore, learners can then be requested to write down, at the close of day, what happened during the day – **diary entry** - which they would be expected to share in class the following day. After the presentation, learners could be instructed to make an input either in agreement or in disagreement – the beginning of **argumentative/persuasive writing**. Equally related, learners start practising the **speech**, that is, how do you start addressing the audience, choice of language and diction to keep the audience interested.

The above activities show how the activities are related, as well as how the beginning of the one activity may sprout into various shoots.

This approach is far from complicated. The only point of deviation is for English teachers to teach for knowledge instead of assessment.

Back to the ripple. *An introduction of a classmate leads to a diary entry, newspaper article, argumentative and persuasive writing, speech, and, critical language awareness.*

The benefit hereof is that the walls between the language skills are brought down. Learners are equipped with the skill to see how interwoven all the skills are. The one activity, they learn, can explode into a flow of activities.

The other benefit, which is the core of the CAPS for languages, is for the 'same' activities or tasks done in the different skills, e.g. speech, dialogue, etc. to be done in the same timeframe. One should not teach a prepared speech in week one and then a written speech in week twelve. If taught in the same timeframe, learners can easily compare the two and learn the similarities and the differences.

The teaching of English can be made fun if more time is spent on areas that need attention. A 'ripple effect' approach, with the necessary practice and support, stands to attain the goal above. With the beginning of a new task, the teacher is able to note the language aspect that needs more support and zeroes on this aspect. In this manner, learning English can be both fun and effective.