

"Talking Circle"

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This experiment was carried out with the 4^{ème} 1 students of Collège Jules Vallès in Fontaine, with the assistance of Barthélémi Rapeaux, third year student -Licence 3- at the University of Humanities - Stendhal-Grenoble 3-, on 22nd January 2016

"Talking Circle" is an activity I wished to implement with my Year-9 students.

The project we were working on was about fashion, giving one's opinion on a style or an outfit. We had already worked on the necessary language tools to express opinion on fashion styles, insisting on pronunciation and stress.

As often with my students, pronunciation and stress patterns are well identified and reproduced when the focus is on phonology. But when it comes to using them in a given situation, there seems to be a strong "resistance"; a tendency to fall back on more French-influenced patterns.

I then thought it might help them to shift the demand of a proper phonology from one set by the teacher, to one set by themselves or/and their classmates.

The "Talking Circle", a cooperation-based learning technique which sets a pronunciation challenge amongst students, seemed the ideal activity to reach that aim:

- The group is divided into 2 teams.
- Each student from a team reads out a word from a *list written on the white board.
- When a word is mispronounced -the teacher playing the part of the referee- the other team takes over, starting at the beginning of the list.
- Each team is granted 2 jokers to get help and 2 captains are designated, whose role it is to relay the correct pronunciation of words -whispered by the teacher- to their team.
- The first team that reaches the end of the list wins the challenge.

In order to succeed, students need to cooperate and listen attentively to their classmates.

For this particular activity, the list was composed of 12 words which were particularly tricky to pronounce with diphthongs, stress on second syllables, reduced vowels etc. -see list below-

The result was quite satisfactory for the students who found the activity both motivating and efficient.

The following class had them use those words in a situation where they had to comment on the different posters on fashion styles they had made.

It turned out that most students who had done the activity remembered how to pronounce the words correctly -occasionally correcting themselves-, and helped their classmates give the right pronunciation without my having to do so.

What remains to be seen now is whether the benefits will be long-lasting or short-lived. My students will soon be assessed on oral production, with a specific demand on correct phonology.

I think part of the success of this activity lies in the fact that it was carried out with a small group of students, as once a week the class is divided into 2 groups -one group goes with an American assistant, while the other group stays with me. Their having to rely on one another is also a determinant.

Another possible factor was the novelty of a new teacher: A perfectly bilingual teacher-to-be trainee was attending the class and wished to carry out an activity. I therefore let him carry it out and took the opportunity to video record the session.

I only filmed part of the activity, but one team actually went through the list, and thus won the challenge, after they had used both their jokers.

I intend to use this technique on a regular basis with all my students, as it is fun to do and seems to be efficient.

****List of words: Tight Wide Colourful Comfortable Fashionable Striped Hideous Ridiculous Quaint Unusual Pathetic Weird***

Le billet du comité de relecture présidé par Silvana Turchino Diksa, IA-IPR

Points forts

- Entraînement phonologique sur une liste de mots précis (connus des élèves) ayant posé des difficultés lors des séances précédentes (réalisation de certains phonèmes/accentuation de mots)
- Motivation par la mise en œuvre ludique (jeu/compétition par équipes)

Autres perspectives possibles

- Laisser le temps d'une phase de « coaching » au sein même de chaque équipe en autonomie
- Offrir la possibilité de recours à un dictionnaire de prononciation en ligne (exemple : HOWDJAY) comme un joker (lifeline) plutôt que de faire appel au professeur (autonomie des élèves et recours au numérique)
- Déterminer précisément le rôle de « captain » au sein de chaque équipe (coaching/ lifeline...)
- Utiliser un « buzzer » (ou un signal sonore précis) pour indiquer plus clairement lorsque la prononciation est incorrecte et donner plus de rythme à l'activité.
- Possibilité de déléguer le rôle « d'arbitre » à un élève de la classe (dans le cas d'élèves bilingues par exemple)