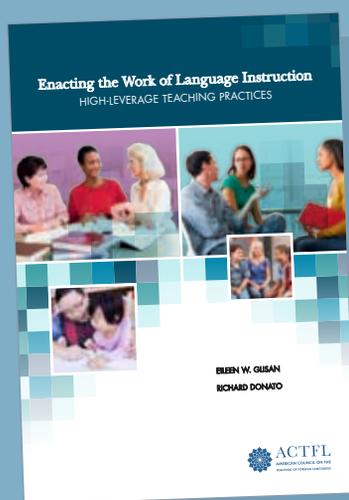


Enacting the Work of Language Instruction

HIGH-LEVERAGE TEACHING PRACTICES

EILEEN W. GLISAN AND RICHARD DONATO



The unique *work of teaching* . . . involves the “core tasks that teachers must execute to help pupils learn” (Ball & Forzani, 2009, p. 497). In the educational literature these core tasks are referred to as **core practices** or **high-leverage teaching practices (HLTPs)** given that they provide the greatest “leverage” for new teachers in bringing about effective student learning. (Page 3)

EDITOR’S NOTE: The new publication from ACTFL—*Enacting the Work of Language Instruction: High-Leverage Teaching Practices* by Eileen W. Glisan and Richard Donato—presents an approach to teacher education and professional development that emphasizes carefully deconstructing fundamental instructional practices that are complex and often not visible through observation, definition, or brief explanation. Its goal is to assist teachers in learning how to enact specific practices, referred to as high-leverage teaching practices, deemed essential to foreign language teaching and situated in theory and research.

This excerpt offers a look at this excellent new resource for language educators of all levels.

The purpose of this text is to present a set of **high-leverage teaching practices** that are essential for novice teachers to enact in their classrooms to support second language learning and development. High-leverage teaching practices (HLTPs) are the “tasks and activities that are essential for skillful beginning teachers to understand, take responsibility for, and be prepared to carry out in order to enact their core instructional responsibilities” (Ball & Forzani, 2009, p. 504). The focus of this text, therefore, is not on a body of knowledge that teachers should possess or standards that they must attain nor is its focus on a long list of “best practices” that teachers should intuitively be able to orchestrate in their classrooms. Rather, this text is designed to assist teachers in learning *how* to enact specific practices deemed essential to foreign language teaching by deconstructing them into various **instructional moves**. Deconstruction of the practice is essential given that the instructional moves of these practices are complex, often impossible to perceive through observation, and difficult to envision and enact based only on theoretical descriptions and discussions. Thus, this text is focused on “practicing” the practices as a way to acquire skill in enacting them through the use of a set of tools to plan and self-assess performance when carrying them out. In other words, this text seeks to make visible complex teaching moves that are often *invisible* through observations of classroom teaching.

The text is designed to serve multiple audiences. First, it can be implemented as a tool by faculty in foreign language teacher preparation programs as they guide their teacher candidates to do the work of teaching in field experiences, i.e., to enact the selected high-leverage teaching practices. Pre-service teachers who are enrolled in a practicum course or peer-teaching laboratory course can use this text as they engage in practicing these HLTPs in anticipation of enacting them in their student teaching or practicum experiences. Additionally, more experienced in-service teachers can benefit from the text to deepen their understanding of current research-based practices and how to enact them in their classes. In a similar vein, the text can be a tool to mediate the professional development of in-service teachers and teacher educators, who might use the text for purposes of lesson study and collaboration with peers within a practice-oriented approach to teacher preparation. In essence, this text is a valuable resource for foreign language professionals at all levels of instruction and at any point in the career continuum. Further, it is the authors' hope that this text will spark much dialogue in the profession about HLTPs in foreign language education as well as promote further research in practice-oriented teacher preparation.



Excerpt from Chapter 1

HLTP #1:

Facilitating Target Language Comprehensibility

Learning how to engage learners in comprehensible talk-in-interaction is fundamental to all language instruction and at all levels.

Research and theory indicate that effective language instruction must provide significant amounts of comprehensible, meaningful, and interesting talk and text in the target language for learners to develop language and cultural proficiency. Further, according to brain-based investigations, learners constantly ask themselves two questions in the face of new ideas or information: “Does this make *sense*?” and “Does this have *meaning*?” (Sousa, 2011, p. 52). Learning experiences that are comprehensible (i.e., make sense to learners) lead to improved retention (Maquire, Frith, & Morris, 1999). In this regard, meaning is an essential criterion for bringing about understanding and learning (Sousa, 2011). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that one high-leverage teaching practice that is essential for *all* foreign language teachers is the use of the target language during instruction in ways that make meaning clear and do not frustrate or de-motivate learners. This chapter will focus on the issue of **target language (TL) comprehensibility**, that is, ways in which teachers can make the target language comprehensible to students, create contexts that support target language comprehensibility, and engage learners in comprehensible interactions.

Research and Theory Supporting the Practice

The use of quality target language in sufficient quantity can be supported from three perspectives. First, research has shown that language learning can occur when learners are exposed to language that is made comprehensible to them. The concept of providing comprehensible and meaningful language to learners to promote language learning is referred to as the **Input Hypothesis** (Krashen, 1981, 1982). The hypothesis claims that to acquire a new language, learners need a large quantity of **comprehensible input** that is interesting, a little beyond their current level of TL competence, but understandable. However, Swain (1985) challenged Krashen's position and claimed that input is *necessary* but *insufficient* for language learning. Swain argued that using the target language, or what is referred to as **comprehensible output**, is equally important because it allows learners to notice where gaps exist in their language knowledge, hypothesize about different ways to express ideas, and focus on how language constructs meaning. What both input and output theories point to is the importance of teachers and learners speaking *in* the target language rather than just speaking *about* the target language, which is typical of grammar-based approaches to language teaching. For learners to progress in their proficiency, they need to experience the target language in action and use the TL for expressing their own meanings. What is more, this view of comprehensible language use in the classroom can never be equated to fill-in-the-blank exercises or language drills.

A second perspective is based on research that confirms that opportunities for learners to engage in conversational interactions in which they work to make themselves understood and to understand their conversational partners are also necessary for language learning (Long, 1983; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica, 1994; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987). According to the theory of **modified interaction**, conversational partners modify their target language as necessary to increase comprehensibility, thereby clarifying the input to be processed. Donato (1994) and Swain (1998, 2000) contest this rather narrow view of interaction in second language acquisition and re-conceptualize interaction as dialogic collaboration. During **collaborative interactions** in the target language, learners mediate their own **metalinguistic awareness** by focusing conscious attention on their own language use and meaning-making abilities. As learners interact using the target language, they can be observed to talk about the language that they produce, question their language use, ask for assistance when needed, and other- or self-correct. Through collaborative and supportive interactions with teachers (and with each other), learners make considerable gains in their ability to function in meaningful ways in the target language.

What these two important considerations (input and collaborative interactions) mean for beginning teachers is that learning how to engage learners in comprehensible **talk-in-interaction** is fundamental to all language instruction and at all levels. Accomplished language instructors know how to help students learn *through* the language and not just about the language.

A third perspective is based on **sociocultural theory** (Vygotsky, 1986) and the role of language as a **mediational tool** for language learning. A major tenet of sociocultural theory is that using language as a cultural meaning-making tool is the result of mediation in a social context. **Mediation**, as the term suggests, refers to the types of support that learners use to make meaning and sense out of the target language they hear. In this way, the use of the target language for instruction becomes a tool to mediate language learning and development and not just a way to provide input to learners' brains for internal processing. The way we speak to and interact with learners develops a supportive relationship that enables learners to perform with assistance and go beyond what they cannot do on their own. Sociocultural theory claims that the use of language as a mediational tool, or more specifically how we speak to learners, is essential for learning and the quality of this mediation can determine what learners learn and what they do not learn.



Considerations About Using the Target Language During Instruction

Several important considerations need to be understood about target language use in the classroom.

(1) What do I talk about? The target language must always occur in **meaningful contexts**. Effective TL is always used within the context of an overarching **communicative goal** and **purposeful activity**. For example, an overarching goal and purpose of communication is to engage learners in comparing and contrasting a particular cultural perspective after hearing or reading about certain cultural practices and products. Learners can learn to provide autobiographical information in the context of applying for a job or a study abroad program. To increase comprehensibility, the TL needs to be connected to learners' background knowledge and interests, needs to motivate sustained listening and meaning-making interaction, and needs to focus on meaning over form. Using the TL when completing mechanical textbook exercises rarely qualifies as the type of language that is useful for language learning or for developing learners who are willing to take risks to express themselves.

(2) Can't I just translate what they don't understand? Continually translating what is said in the TL into the learners' first language needs to be avoided. If the teacher's TL utterances are always followed by a translation, learners quickly realize that they need not focus on the target language message and that, if they just wait long enough, a translation of the target language will be provided.

(3) What is most important is that I talk in the TL, right? Using the TL alone in the absence of knowing how to make the target language comprehensible to learners is not sufficient. Further, using the TL for instruction does not mean giving a teacher-fronted lecture to the

class. Mediating TL comprehension means interacting with learners through frequent and reliable **comprehension checking**, e.g., engaging in question and answer exchanges, cueing learner responses, or asking them to demonstrate actively their comprehension of what they heard through gesture, dramatization, or by manipulating objects or images.

(4) Can't I just use pictures and gestures to make my learners understand me? Using the TL in ways that foster comprehension requires more than showing pictures or making gestures to illustrate what is said. Relying on these ways alone to increase comprehension actually works against developing learners' ability to make meaning from what they hear. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. However, language learning is precisely about language and meaning; an overreliance on using pictures and gestures could prevent learners from engaging cognitively with the TL. Pictures and gestures certainly support comprehension and are frequently used by teachers, but they should never entirely replace learners' attention to the meanings and functions that language forms convey.

(5) What do I do if learners complain about my using the TL to the maximum extent in class? Learners need incentives to engage in sustained listening and use of the TL. While some are motivated by assessing their own progress in language use, others may need external motivations such as recognition for their achievement or the earning of special awards and privileges for their attempts to use the TL during class. Creating a classroom discourse community in which the target language is used for instruction takes time and patience (see Chapter 2). Teachers may need to provide motivation for target language use beyond simply the threat of a bad grade.

(6) What are learners supposed to comprehend? Learners need clear goals that indicate what they are expected to understand (Crouse, 2014). Using the TL in class does not mean that learners are required to understand every word that is said or every idea that is expressed. If the teacher believes that learners need to understand every word, target language use will become nothing more than repetitions of isolated words and phrases. Using the TL means modifying one's language and adjusting it to the level of the learners in much the same way that a native speaker speaks to a non-native speaker. What is comprehensible to a third- or fourth-year learner will not be comprehensible to a first-year learner. Using the TL for instruction means constantly adjusting how teachers speak in relation to what learners know, are able to do, and are in the process of learning to do.



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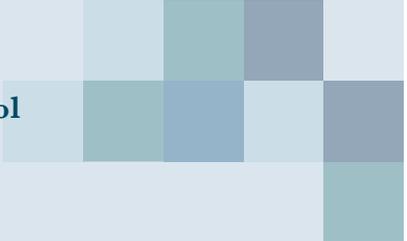


Figure 1.2 Interaction and Target Language Comprehensibility Tool

Name of teacher: _____

Date of observation: _____

This observation tool will help you *monitor the comprehensibility* of your target language use or of other teachers whom you observe. By completing the checklist, the teacher will understand areas of strength and in which improvement is needed.

Category I: Creating Comprehensible LANGUAGE

- The teacher paraphrases new words and expressions.
- The teacher defines new words with examples rather than translation.
- The teacher slows down the rate of speech according to the level of the learners.
- The teacher uses vocabulary and structures that learners know and builds on them over time.
- The teacher uses new words and expressions more than once or twice and enters and re-enters these language elements frequently in the input.
- The teacher signals new words and structures with tone of voice.
- The teacher uses connected discourse rather than presenting isolated words for drill and repetition.

Category II: Creating CONTEXTS for comprehension

- The teacher uses gestures to make new language clear.
- The teacher uses visuals and concrete objects to support comprehension.
- The teacher focuses learner attention on the topic and objective of the lesson in advance of presentations and discussions.
- The teacher creates a lesson with a purpose relevant to learners' lives.

Category III: Creating comprehensible INTERACTIONS with learners

- The teacher interacts with learners using active comprehension checking strategies (e.g., signaling).
- The teacher interacts with students and checks how well they are following what is said by cueing for recurrent words and phrases in the discourse.
- The teacher uses question sequences that begin with yes/no questions, moves to forced-choice questions, and ends with open-ended, WH-questions.
- The teacher provides useful expressions and phrases to help learners negotiate meaning, such as asking for repetition, asking for clarification (Can you say more?), checking their comprehension (Do you mean . . . ?), and confirming their understanding (I think you are saying . . . Am I right?).

Source: Donato, original material, 2011, modified 2016