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Issues in Applied Linguistics

Title
Sound Ideas: Advanced Listening and Speaking

Permalink
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Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 9(1)

ISSN
1050-4273

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Publication Date
1998-06-30

DOI
10.5070/L491005269

Peer reviewed

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Sound Ideas: Advanced Listening and Speaking
by Helen Fragiadakis and Virginia M. Maurer. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle,1995. 257 pp.

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In recent years the attention being paid to the development of oral language skills in second language instruction has increased. This attention is partly a result of the acceptance and promotion of more communicative and meaning-based approaches to language teaching. This growing interest has resulted in the production of more oral language texts that provide opportunities for English language learners to develop and practice listening and speaking skills. One new twist in the new approaches is that the majority of these texts build on learners' grammatical knowledge and incorporate actual discourse situations in their task applications.

Sound Ideas: Advanced Listening and Speaking, written by Helen Fragiadakis and Virginia M. Maurer, is one of many volumes in Heinle and Heinle's Tapestry series targeting students of English as a Second Language (ESL). Since it was specifically prepared for developing the oral communication (listening and speaking) skills of advanced ESL learners, it successfully supplements texts targeting the development of the other language skills (study skills, grammar, vocabulary, etc.).

Like all the other texts in the series, *Sound Ideas* is developed upon certain principles that reflect a specific philosophy of language learning and teaching. These are expressed at the beginning of the text and serve as a foundation upon which the chapters and their individual activities are based. These principles are:

1. Empowering learners
2. Helping students improve their learning strategies
3. Recognizing and handling learning styles effectively
4. Offering authentic, meaningful communication
5. Understanding and valuing different cultures
6. Integrating language skills.

Upon examination of these principles, one can undoubtedly conclude that the text's content and activities are student-oriented; in other words, the learning that occurs in *Sound Ideas* depends a great deal on student involvement and student activity.

Fragiadakis and Maurer's approach to oral communication represents one in which from the very start, practical, everyday communication is the focus. For this purpose, the authors have chosen to combine listening and speaking activities under specially chosen topics. Their approach is based on, and informed by the inter-

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
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Vol. 9 No. 1, 61-64

active nature of listening, and oral communication on the whole. That, in itself, is a reflection of what occurs in the "real-world," since most of the time language users are responding to what they are hearing either verbally or non-verbally (i.e., using gestures or responding physically). In ensuring faithfulness to authenticity, the authors' approach has some tenets of whole language or integrated approaches to language teaching. This is evident in the fact that although the text's emphasis is primarily on developing listening and speaking skills, reading and writing are also integrated, and thus receive attention.

The text has eight chapters and a preview chapter that focuses on getting students to reflect on the learning strategies they use in establishing and creating meaning in oral language situations. All eight chapters are similarly structured with an introduction, warm-up activities, listening and speaking activities, follow-up activities, and learning assessment. In each chapter, there are opportunities for the learners to check their background knowledge in order to prepare for the topic being discussed and set the goals they want to achieve.

The listening activities help the learners both practice their learning skills, and help them "learn to listen." Underwood (1989) outlines the tasks involved in "learning to listen":

> By "learning to listen," then, we mean that we want our students to attend to what they hear, to process it, to understand it, to interpret it, to evaluate it, to respond to it. We want them to become involved and active listeners (p.4).

Sound Ideas' listening activities are arranged in three stages, encouraging learners to prepare for and organize their listening tasks and goals. The first stage is pre-listening, in which the authors set up the challenges of and the reasons for listening. For example, the students may be required to read an article, identify important vocabulary items, and focus on their pragmatic use. This enables the students to get "tuned in" so they know what to expect (Underwood, 1989). Then there are the 'as you listen' activities, which challenge and guide the learner to handle the information. The 'after you listen' activities, which include tasks like giving directions or writing summaries, help the learner reflect on the language in very specific ways.

This kind of organization helps the learner to develop specific listening skills. The layout engages the learners in active, rather than passive listening, thereby encouraging them to participate in their own learning through collaborative exploration of ideas: analyzing, criticizing, challenging, and speculating rather than simply listening and absorbing.

The speaking activities usually follow the listening activities. They require the students to examine and discuss certain opinions presented in articles or in excerpts from speeches and critically analyze these opinions in light of specific questions or tasks. These activities present students with opportunities to engage in role-play and simulation exercises, so that as much as possible, learners remain

close to the real world. In that way, students automatically establish meaningful links between in-classroom activities and out-of-class occurrences.

The follow-up activities provided in each chapter are specifically helpful in reinforcing that link as well. They require the students to go outside the classroom and engage in tasks/activities in which they apply their acquired knowledge and skills to accomplish certain goals. For example, the students may have to conduct a small survey, or locate some information in the library. These activities once again help students focus on the benefits and importance of the learning activities, thus adding meaning and purpose to the classroom activities.

The content topics selected in each chapter are relevant to everyday experiences and can thus be described as authentic in nature. They are sufficiently realistic, yet adequately challenging, and include: "Telephone Technology: A Curse or a Blessing," "Humor—Its Role in our Lives," and "Academic Dishonesty—How Common is Cheating?" among others. The very nature and phrasing of these topics set the stage for students to become involved in a realistic way. In other words, the activities surrounding these topics encourage analytical processing and creative thinking, and they promote the development and use of higher order thinking skills that are appropriate for advanced students. I was particularly impressed with the topic and the choice of material in Chapter Five: "A Medical Question—Should Doctors Always Tell The Truth?" This stimulating topic, which touches on the moral and aesthetic sides of the issue, is relevant to students and teachers alike, and promises to provoke very healthy class discussion.

The materials provided for the activities are wide in range. They include newspaper articles, comic and cartoon strips, transcribed excerpts from recorded discussions and debates, stories, letters, etc.—all representing the types of materials that students interact with on a daily basis. The choice of content and materials thus provides a functional basis for learning; i.e., students are able to use the target language to perform the variety of functions that they would have to perform in the actual community where the target language is spoken.

The learning assessment questions at the end of each chapter are also especially useful in getting students to evaluate their learning and helping them to reorganize their strategies in preparation for subsequent chapters. These questions help students keep track of the strategies they use—which ones are successful in helping them achieve their goals, and which ones they need to improve upon or change.

At the end of the text, Fragiadakis and Maurer provide fifteen comprehensive appendices with detailed information about the procedures for accomplishing certain tasks along with information on the importance of some of the activities in the text. This is a very useful reference section—one that provides learner clarification, and therefore encourages learners to practice research skills.

One of the other positive aspects of the text is its general layout. The clear print used throughout the text, the bold print against the soft blue used to highlight certain headings, the captivating cartoons, the informative threads running through-

out the text, and the strategy highlighters all combine to create a pleasant visual presentation, which can be very motivating for the learner.

Sound Ideas, therefore, seems to be just that. The goals presented for the students are achievable; the chapters are neatly and sensibly organized; the activities are explicit, practical, and realistic; and the content and materials are authentic, meaningful, and largely communicative in nature. Overall, the students are actively participating in their learning experiences. For these reasons, it can be concluded that the text is aptly titled and truly sound.

REFERENCES

Underwood, M. (1989). *Teaching listening.* London: Longman.