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TEACHING CONVERSATION.

There are two main approaches to teaching conversation. One gives the teacher a large amount of control over what the learner says, and the other gives the learner a great deal of choice regarding the constructions and vocabulary he uses. These two approaches are often used together. At the beginning of a course the learner practises controlled conversation and later, as he learns more, he is given greater freedom. Some language teachers do not like controlled conversation at all, because they believe that the learner should have as much opportunity as possible to experiment with the language and discover its system himself. Both approaches have strong arguments in their favour. At the moment the "free" approach is most popular with psychologists and grammarians.

METHODS OF PRACTISING CONTROLLED CONVERSATION

In controlled conversation the learners are required to copy a model.

1. Structural drill or pattern practice is often used as a method of practising conversation. In this sort of drill the learners are not expected to make any mistakes.
2. The dialogue is like structural drill, except that it involves several sentences, usually a conversation between two or more people. The learners have to memorize the dialogue. There are many different types of dialogues. Some are based on certain grammatical constructions. Others are based on a certain situation, like buying a shirt, or asking directions. Some others are like substitution tables because the same sentence patterns can be used, but the vocabulary can be changed. These are sometimes called substitution dialogues. Dialogues are usually practised by pairs of learners. Most teachers recommend that gestures and emotional feelings should be a part of dialogue practice. This usually makes the learning of dialogues much more interesting for the students. Michael West recommends a valuable language practice technique for learning dialogues. It is called "Look and Say". The learner reads a sentence in the dialo-

gue quickly and then looks up, moving only his eyes, at the sentence while looking at his partner. He never speaks while looking at the book. This forces the learner to hold the sentence in his brain for a short time. This technique can be used usefully to improve dictation skill.

3. a) Dialogues can be taught by using puppets, model theatres, flannel-boards etc.
- b) Plays are often used to teach conversation. Model short plays in easy English are available in graded readers and they can be copied, memorized, and performed. Learners may also write their own plays and perform them. The teacher can help the learners do this by telling them a story that is to be made into a play.
- c) There are many games that are very enjoyable that can be used to give practice in conversation.
- d) Poems and songs do not really give conversational practice, but they do require the learners to orally produce what they have memorized. Most learners enjoy songs. The songs and poems should contain useful English.
- e) The learners are given a piece of English to study. The piece of English contains vocabulary and structures that are used for conversation practice after they have read the passage. The conversation is based on the material in the passage with slight changes in content. This approach is used in the first year I.K.I.P. materials.

METHODS OF PRACTISING FREE CONVERSATION

In free conversation, the teacher usually gives the learners some ideas about what they can talk about, but does not usually give them help with how to talk about it.

1. The teacher can choose controversial subjects for discussion so that the learners will be interested and be eager to talk. It is good if the learners have some to think about the subject before they are required to discuss it.

2. Debates, mock trials, telephone conversations, role interviews can be used as a means of getting the learner to speak. These activities usually require some preparatory work. If a tape-recorder is available, it can be used to record and play back the conversations. A certain amount of imagination and acting is required.

3. A piece of written English can be used as a basis for discussion. The learners can discuss the ideas in the passage or they can discuss what sort of person wrote the passage and what his feelings were. Cartoons can be used in the same way.

4. For a whole lesson, the learners can imagine that they are involved in a certain situation, for example, that they are on a ship. They can act parts, sing songs, and play games that are normal in that situation. This is like play acting except that the learners are free to decide what they will do. There is no set plan to follow. For adult learners the situation can be suited to their needs, for example, imagine you are involved in a traffic accident, or imagine you have eaten a meal in a restaurant and find you have no money.

5. An imaginary situation can be created in order to give the learners practice in speaking at different social levels. Here is an example.

The Registrar of the University has just called you to tell you that you forgot to play the fee for a course. You may have to repeat it next year, even though you have done all the work and have attended all the classes.

- a) Tell your closest friend about the problem.
- b) Tell your teacher about it.
- c) Telephone your family and explain.

Most conversation activities require the learners to use their imagination. For both young and adult learners this can make conversation classes very interesting and enjoyable. With large groups of learners controlled conversation does not present any problems. Free conversation however requires more organization and it is sometimes possible to break a large class into smaller groups, with some groups doing controlled conversation (learning dialogues, plays, poems etc.) while a few groups practice free conversation with the teacher's help.

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I.K.I.P. "JOGJAKARTA"