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DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

DISCOURSE

According to the dictionary the meaning of discourse may be understood in the following way:

discourse: 1. verbal communication; talk, conversation; 2. a formal treatment of a subject in speech or writing; 3. a unit of text used by linguists for the analysis of linguistic phenomena that range over more than one sentence;

discourse: the ability to reason

David Crystal (1987) defines "discourse" in the following way—

Discourse analysis focusses on the structure of naturally occurring spoken language, as found in such 'discourses' as conversations, interviews, commentaries and speeches. Text analysis focusses on the structure of written language, as found in such 'texts' as essays, notices, road signs and chapters. But this distinction is not clear-cut, and there have been many other uses of these labels. In particular, 'discourse' and 'text' can be used in a much broader sense to include all language units with a definable communicative function, whether spoken or written. Some scholars talk about 'spoken or written discourse', others about 'spoken or written text'.

Geoffrey Leech and *Michael Short* (cited in Hawthorn, 1992) argue that—

Discourse is linguistic communication seen as a transaction between speaker and hearer, as an interpersonal activity whose form is determined by its social purpose.

Emile Benveniste (1971) contrasts discourse with 'the language system', when he states:

The sentence, an undefined creation of limitless variety, is the very life of human speech in action. We conclude from this that with the sentence we leave the domain of language as a system of signs and enter into another universe, that of language as an instrument of communication, whose expression is discourse...Discourse must be understood in its widest sense: every utterance assumes a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way.... It is every variety of oral discourse of every nature from trivial conversation to the most elaborate oration...but it is also the mass of writing that reproduces oral discourse or that borrows its manner of expression and its purposes: correspondence, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all genres in which someone addresses [themselves] as the speaker, and organises what [they say] in the category of person. The distinction we are making between historical narration and discourse does not at all coincide with that between written language and the spoken. Historical utterance is today reserved for the written language, but discourse is written as well as spoken. In practice, one passes from one to the other instantaneously. Each time that discourse appears in the midst of historical narration, for example, when the historian reproduces someone's words or when [they themselves intervene] in order to comment upon the events reported, we pass to another tense system, that of discourse.

He thus characterises discourse as the domain of communication.

Roger Fowler (cited in Hawthorn, 1992) states, 'Discourse' is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs etc. constitute a way of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience—'ideology' in the neutral non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which the discourse is embedded.

Discourse is the cardinal constituent of a culture. According to **Gee, Hull & Lankshear** (1996), "A discourse is composed of ways of talking, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing and using tools and objects, in particular settings and at specific times so as to display or to recognize a particular social identity."

Gee (1989) refers to a discourse as an "identity kit" that tells us how to talk, act and behave so that others would recognise us as belonging to a particular community. Discourse is laden with values and ideologies and is closely connected to social power.

Bakhtin's insightful words on the study of discourses bring out the nature of discourse:

One of the main subjects of human speech is discourse itself ...The specific nature of discourse as a topic of speech, one that requires the transmission and re-processing of another's word, has not been understood: one may speak of another's discourse only with the help of that alien discourse itself, although in the process, it is true, that the speaker introduces into the other's words his own intentions and highlights the context of those words in his own way. (Bakhtin 1981, 355)

Scholars like **Gee** (1989) have distinguished between two main types of discourses-

(i) Primary Discourse and

(ii) Secondary Discourse

Marianne Exum Lopez in her book *When Discourses Collide: An Ethnography of Migrant Children* (1999) defines these as—

A **Primary** discourse is the **discourse of the home**. One naturally grows in the primary discourse based on one's membership in a family. **Secondary** Discourses are many and come together in the **public sphere**. We can find secondary discourses in the school. Secondary discourses are acquired as one becomes a member of a social group or secondary institution not connected directly with the home.

Bakhtin's call for discourse analysis urges educational researchers to seek a deeper understanding of how language is

constantly being formed as it is spoken by those who are learning it and claiming it for themselves, and thus to focus on home and school language. "Language," Bakhtin writes, "is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages" (Bakhtin 1981, 356-57). Every minute we are alive, we are negotiating a space for ourselves in our world. The world of work, the world of home, and the social groups we belong to each share commonalities that make up their own respective discourses. It is this use of language through membership in our different social groups that positions us in the world and establishes our identity. The family, but especially the children in multilingual households, are pivotal to the progression of "heteroglossia" in the home (Bakhtin 1981). Heteroglossia is the space around spoken language where it seeks to be understood and given life based on those who hear it and make meaning out of it. It implies that there are multiple meanings of language based on the recipients and the way(s) they are able to interpret language. This heteroglot development of language, derived from home, school, the workplace, and the community, helps to define and establish the ways of human life within a certain context.

Language plays a central role in construction of experiences. Language does not simply represent an experience, as is widely believed, but more importantly, it constitutes experience itself. From this perspective language plays a central role in learning. Understanding how the learning experience is being constituted by language is crucial to understanding how different ways of experiencing the object of learning are brought about in the classroom. This is to say that the same phenomenon can be experienced in qualitatively different ways and the consequent construction of experience will be reflected in the language used. For instance, if a laboratory assistant of an educational institution locks the door of a physics laboratory and two students try to open the door in vein, the first student may say, 'The laboratory assistant locked the door', whereas the second student may say, 'The laboratory is locked'. The same phenomenon is thus construed in different ways by these two students. For the first student, the laboratory assistant was the point of departure of the message, whereas for the second student, the door was the

point of departure. It is evident that for the first student the experience of irritation is about what the laboratory assistant did, and by contrast, for the second student the experience and message is more about the locked state of the door and the laboratory. The relationship between language and experience can be best seen by examining data on child language development. *Halliday* (1975) in his seminal work on Nigel's language development, shows that for children, learning language is also ,learning about the world through language. *Halliday* (1993) observed that—

> When children learn language, they are not simply engaging in one type of learning among many; rather, they are learning the foundations of learning itself the distinctive characteristics of human learning is that it is a process of making meaning—a semiotic process, and the prototypical form of human semiotic is language.

As a child experiences the world and he learns how to mean, his meaning potential is being reconstituted. The relationship between language and experience is dialectic. A child learns about variations and distinctions that are realized in language and the linguistic distinction helps the child to understand the variations in the world around him. For instance, a child who plays with a spherical ball, tends to identify any spherical object as a ball. With the help of language the teacher or elders may point out the distinction between spherical balls, door knobs, lamp sheds, balloons and so on. With such distinctions the child's semantic system goes on changing and his experiences change as well. He experiences that balls that are light and can be blown up into the air are balloons as opposed to the balls he plays with in the playground. *Halliday* (1978) observed that in this process—

> The construal of reality is inseparable from the construal of the semantic system in which the reality is encoded. In this sense, language is a shared meaning potential, at once both a part of expedience and an inter-subjective interpretation of experience.

This meaning potential or the process of making meaning of the world is being reconstituted every time the child experiences language in use and experiences what he can do with language.

It is interesting to note that in order to make sense of what we have experience we always try to classify the experiences into a manageable number of phenomena of similar types. *Britton* (1970) pointed out that objects and experiences in the world do not present themselves as readily classified. Human beings try to classify them in order to handle the infinite variety encountered in one life time in this vast world. Language is perhaps the only way of doing it. *Britton* gives the example of the case of a male human being who is related to by blood to one's father and another male human being who is not related by blood his father. There is no other way to distinguish between these two male human beings other than using language, 'uncle' in English for example, to classify the one related to the father by blood.

Sapir (1961) pointed out,

> ...language is primarily a vocal actualization of the tendency to see realities symbolically...and actualization in terms of vocal expression of the tendency to master reality not by direct and ad hoc handling of this element but by the reduction of experience to familiar forms.

On similar lines, *Halliday* (1978) proposed that

> Language has to interpret the whole of our experience, reducing the indefinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, and also of the world inside us, the processes of our own consciousness, to a manageable number of classes of phenomena: types of processes, events and actions, classes of objects, people and institutions, and the like.

Distinctions and classifications are meant by human beings to serve specific needs at particular moments in time. The nature of human discourse, thus largely depends on what kind of experience and context he is trying to capture and convey. For instance, when one witnesses an accident between a black and a white car, he may say that there was a head on collision between a black and a white car but if the same person is talking about the critical condition of a familiar persons in one of the cars he might simply say that the person is critically injured due to a

collision between two cars, without any reference to their colours. It is so because in the second case the colour of the car is not important in relation to the context.

DISCOURSE IN THE CLASSROOM

Diane Macdonnell (1986) clearly relates discourse with social practice and environment and this leads to an understanding of the nature of classroom discourse. She states: 'dialogue is the primary condition of discourse; all speech and writing is social'; and she goes on to say: 'discourses differ with the kinds of institutions and social practices in which they take shape and with the positions of those who speak and those whom theyaddress' (Macdonnell, 1986:1). Thus, a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence. Institutions and social context therefore play an important determining role in the development, maintenance and circulation of discourses. In discussing nature of discourse, Macdonnell comments:

A 'discourse' as a particular area of language use may be identified by the institutions to which it relates and by the positions from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. The position does not exist by itself, however. Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint taken up by the discourse through its relation to another, ultimately an opposing discourse.

Classrooms are complex places where teachers and students create and re-create, adopt and adapt, and engage in a full range of human interactions. Teachers and students are viewed as active agents. Although teachers and students must act within the events, contexts, and settings in which they find themselves, and although they must react to the actions of others and the social institutions of which they are a part, they nonetheless act on the worlds in which they live.

At the centre of what happens in classrooms is language: the language used by teachers and students, the language of texts and textbooks, the language of school and school district policies,

the language of parents and children as they interact with each other and with educators, and myriad other uses of language. Language is both the object of classroom lessons (e.g., learning to read, write, and use academic discourse) as well as the means of learning (e.g., through classroom discussions and lectures, reading, and writing). Language is not a "transparent" vehicle for the communication of information. Any use of language (spoken, written, electronic, etc.) involves complex social, cultural, political, cognitive, and linguistic processes and contexts-all of which are part of the meaning and significance of reading, writing, and using language. As **Robinson** (1987) wrote:

It will no longer do, I think, to consider literacy as some abstract, absolute quality attainable through tutelage and the accumulation of knowledge and experience. It will no longer do to think of reading as a solitary act in which a mainly passive reader responds to cues in a text to find meaning. It will no longer do to think of writing as a mechanical manipulation of grammatical codes and formal structures leading to the production of perfect or perfectible texts. Reading and writing are not unitary skills nor are they reducible to sets of component skills falling neatly under discrete categories (linguistic, cognitive); rather, they are complex human activities taking place in complex human relationships, (p. 329)

Teaching students to be readers and writers is as much a matter of language socialization, enculturation, identity production, power relations, and situated interaction (i.e., knowing what to do and how to interact with others in a specific situation) as teaching how to manipulate symbol systems. It is also an intimate part of identity formation, both individual and social. How one engages in reading and writing, when, where, and with whom, as well as how one engages in learning to read and write, both reflects and constructs one's identity.

Mary Philips Manke (1997) in her book *Understanding Teacher-Student Interactions* provides important characteristics about the nature of classroom discourse:

1. Power belongs to both teacher and students. Just as teachers have interactional resources that affect how

students act, students use their own resources to shape teachers' behaviour.

2. Human interaction creates a context in which further interaction occurs. The actions of participants are shaped by the actions of those around them—both teachers and students.

3. Teachers and students bring their own agendas to the classroom. For their own reasons, they often conceal these agendas beneath a public shared agenda of cooperation or perhaps beneath some other shared agenda. The nature of discourse is shaped accordingly.

4. Some of the resources teachers and students use as they build a structure of power relationships can be found in the area of discourse; teachers (and students) choose from an array of interactional resources as they construct classroom power relationships.

The teacher is in power in the class and uses a variety of discourse strategies to establish and maintain this power over the students. Students are not dominated directly and they should never feel that they are servile to the orders of the teacher. This would kill their independent thinking and rationalising power. Thus the teacher uses a variety of discourse strategies.

The term discourse strategies refers to the effects on classroom relationships and learning of teachers' decisions about how to speak to students. It refers to a variety of choices a teacher might make about what to say and how to say it, and to the patterns of such choices that become apparent. There are

(i) direct discourse strategies

(ii) indirect discourse strategies chosen by teachers

Interestingly, it has been found that indirect strategies constitute a mark of superior teaching.

McDermott and Roth (1978), however, held that people placed in cross-cultural groups quickly learn to understand what others are communicating, or to comprehend the expectations of others, as they jointly construct a context for interaction. When "communication problems" persist, they have another source besides misunderstanding.

Teachers choose discourse strategies of indirection when, instead of stating or telling directly what they want, they speak to their students in a more oblique way. These strategies include the following:

(i) Using politeness formulas (these forms of speech are discussed in more detail below).

(ii) Using speech acts whose surface meaning was not the same as their meaning in the interaction.

(iii) Placing themselves with the class, rather than underlining their status as teacher (one way of doing this was using the pronoun we, rather than you or I; Brown & Levinson [1978] named this as a face-saving strategy).

(iv) Praising desired behavior rather than criticizing undesired behavior.

(v) Stating general principles of behavior, rather than scolding or giving commands.

(vi) Asking for student opinions about process decisions.

(vii) Correcting student behavior unobtrusively, by a touch or silent gesture, rather than by giving a command.

(viii) Offering many choices to students (but always from a range of possibilities that they themselves had selected and approved).

Indirect strategies are effective means of sustaining power relations between teacher and students in the class without suffocating the critical consciousness of the students and development of their independent spirit. These strategies are effective for promoting the public agenda of cooperation by controlling children's behaviour silently and unobtrusively, while allowing the flow of classroom interchange to continue uninterrupted.

Yani Zhang, School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, discusses the varieties of classroom discourse where a discrimination between traditional and non-traditional discourses is made.

(i) **Traditional discourse** refer to the using of a three-part sequence in classroom discourse: teacher initiation,

student response, and teacher evaluation or follow-up (IRE or IRF). Lemke describes this format as 'triadic dialogue' (Wells, 1999:167).

(ii) Non-traditional discourse means the sequence of talk in classrooms does not fit an IRE structure on account of a changed educational goal (Cazden, 2001:31).

These two prominent alternatives of classroom discourse have earlier been differentiated by **Bakhtin** (1981 cited in Skidmore, 2000:284) as—

(i) 'authoritative discourse'—'someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error', and

(ii) 'internally persuasive discourse'—refers to more students' responses, student self-selection and students' topic expansion (Skidmore, 2000).

Thus, it is obvious that in traditional lessons teachers generally dominate the class talk; students have fewer opportunities to ask their own questions or generate subtopics (**Gutierrez**, 1994). However, according to **Wells** (1999:167), the IRE structure in teaching takes up about 70 percent of all the classroom discourses in many secondary schools as well as some primary ones. In a research conducted by **Nystrand** (1997), it was also found that the dominated pattern of classroom interaction was monologically-organised instruction, i.e. traditional IRE sequences rather than dialogically-organized form which can promote 'retention and in-depth processing associated with the cognitive manipulation of information'. This view is also supported by **Wood** (1992) and **Lemke** (1990), who advocate teachers to use a less controlling type of discourse to encourage student participation to the largest extent.

According to **Skidmore** (2000:292), it is the inherent nature of the task for the students to complete that results in the differences. That is, what types of questions given by the teachers engender the distinctions. Questions are applied to check learners' attention, evaluate rote learning, and even to stimulate their thinking and discussion. **Wood** (1992:205) claims that questions may 'motive, sustain and direct the thought processes of the pupil' and promote reflection as well as self-examination.

Apparently, questions have significant effects on classroom activities.

Skidmore (2003) analyzes three categories of questioning: questions with one right answer; with a finite set of right answers and with an indeterminate though bounded set of possible answers. The first type, namely, closed or two-choice questions are criticized for not only failing to promote pupils' deep thinking but also inhibiting their intellectual activity (**Wood**, 1992:205). The use of closed and Wh-type questions can result in pupils' short responses, less participation and misunderstanding. The second type is more open-ended and has more 'cognitively challenging quality' than the first; while the third type, questions with an indeterminate number of possible answers are authentic which the teacher does not know what the pupils will answer (**Skidmore**, 2003:50).

As **Nystrand & Gamoran** (1997:73) state, only authentic discourse can engage students, and authentic questions must stimulate pupils to think and reflect on the consequences of their ideas, not just recall their past experiences. Therefore, teachers should identify when frequent questions are needed and what types of questions are appropriate. From my point of view, authentic questions are in no doubt helpful in promoting learners' thinking and accelerating the learning process. Nonetheless, because closed questions can rapidly examine students' understanding and knowledge in classroom interaction, In order to strike a balance, teachers should take into account many factors, such as: the teaching situation, classroom size, pressure from the centrally prescribed curriculum, culture diversities, etc. For instance, if there are a large number of students in one classroom, then it will be impossible to ask many open-ended questions in a period and then the teacher can try to afford as many opportunities as possible to enhance students' participation. Cultural bearings often compel students to stay silent and they seldom express their thoughts in front of other peers or the teacher. Cultural conditioning sanction a passive acceptance of the authoritative perspective from the teacher, the teachers' books or the syllabus. Open ended questions find little response in such an environments. This culture factor brings about convergent understanding and

progress but not divergence. Also, there is this pressure from the centrally prescribed curriculum. Since all teachers have to complete the tasks in the curriculum and handle all kinds of exams, the application of authentic questions becomes harder and less popular.

Being one basic means of teaching, talk is 'arguably the true foundation of learning' (*Alexander*, 2004:5). It is through talk that children actively engage and teachers constructively intervene (ibid). In *Alexander's* (2004) classroom research conducted around the world, it is found that most teachers basically use three kinds of classroom talk:

(i) **'rote'** means mechanically practicing facts, ideas and routines;

(ii) **'recitation'** refers to the accumulation of knowledge and understanding through questions to test the pupils' previous knowledge or to apply them clues in the question to work it out;

(iii) **'instruction/exposition'** concerns 'telling the pupil what to do, imparting information and explaining facts, principles or procedures'.

Teachers apply two additional kinds of classroom talk which have greater cognitive potential:

(i) **discussion**—existing between teacher-class, teacher-group or pupil-pupil, means the exchange of ideas in sharing information and solving problems (*Alexander*, 2000:527).

(ii) **scaffolded dialogue**—refers to 'achieving common understanding through structured and cumulative questioning and discussion which guide and prompt, reduce choices, minimize risk and error, and expedite 'handover' of concepts and principles' (ibid). Perhaps because scaffolded dialogue is more complicated and requires more teacher skills, it remains less common in classroom teaching.

Barnes (1992:126) distinguishes two functions of talk:

(i) **Presentational talk**, on one hand, focuses more on the needs of the teacher than on the student's own ideas. It usually occurs when teacher is trying to seek answers

from students to test their understanding of a topic already taught.

(ii) **Exploratory talk** enables learners to 'try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns' (ibid).

Because much of the talk elicited from pupils is essentially presentational, Barnes (1992:126) proposes that teachers consider when and where to employ presentational or exploratory talk and ensure a balance of them.

Thus it is seen that in the **context of a learning situation such as the classroom**, the language that is used by the teacher and the students to make distinctions in relation to the object/topic of learning is often of critical importance. For instance, a science teacher, in the context of teaching how a reed relay operates, asks the students what happened to the electrical resistance value when light was shone on a light-diode resistor (LDR). If a student replies 'small' it is evident that the student is trying to make a distinction between the size of the resistance in the LDR before and after the light was shone on it. The student here is describing resistance as a state. The teacher is not satisfied with the description because his question was what happened to the resistance, i.e. about the change of state. The teacher will then insist that the student should use the verb 'decreases' instead of the adjective 'small'. The teacher is not nitpicking, but is making a very important distinction between a *state* and a *change of state*. It is thus seen that in classroom discourse understanding phenomena depends greatly on linguistic distinctions and appropriate use of language related to the context.

Another relevant example of a classroom learning situation is given by *Ference Marten* in *Classroom Discourse and the Space of Learning* (2004). Here two Hong Kong primary teachers were teaching two different chapters about festivals. One of the objects of learning in both the chapters was to help the students to indicate their preferences for the festivals, using the phrase 'like based'. The teachers asked their students to take down a list of festivals from the board and to indicate the ones

they liked and then to indicate which one they liked the best. In this way the teachers opened up a dimension of variation in indicating presences that included 'like' and 'like based'. The choice of 'do not like' was implied or presupposed. It is interesting to note that the moment a student wrote names under 'like' option, he was actually dealing three choices - like, dislike and like based. By juxtaposing like and like based he teacher was helping the student to experience finer variations in their feeling towards these festivals rationally and logically. Each time a student chose any festival as his most favaourite one from the many festivals he liked, he reconstituted his experience associated with that particular festival and logically thought about the reason behind his fascination with this one particular festival. In contrast the second teacher simply asked her students what they liked best and most of the students came up with more than one name in the process. This is an interesting example that showed how language or the nature of classroom discourse reconstitutes human experience and thoughts.

An important feature of classroom discourse is using language meaningfully in order to bring critical features of the object of learning into the students' focus. **This is achieved through the use of questions** since the very structure of questions involves a relationship between the core concept and the rest of the information clustered around the core. For instance, a general question like 'Have you stopped bullying other children?', presupposes that the child has been bullying other children for long . This is to say that bullying the children is the core concept and whether the child's behaviour has changed and why is the associated chain of information. What the teacher presents as the **core** is what is assumed to be **shared knowledge**, and what he presents as the **figure**/associated or implied information is what he wants to be the focus of the students' attention. An example may be discussed to show how different questions asked by different teachers can result in different learning experiences for the students in a class. Two English teachers are teaching the determiner 'some' to indicate a quantity that is mot exactly specified. Both the teachers are using old MacDonald's firm as the context for teaching and both the teachers are showing the students a series of pictures with

different kinds of animals and different numbers of animals. One teacher showed figures of animals and repeatedly asked the students, 'How many cats can you see?' / 'How many ducks can you see?' / 'How many sheep can you see?' and so on. These questions elicited responses with exact numbers like 3, 4, 5 etc. the second teacher, however, went on asking 'What can you see in the picture?', and never asks about the numbers. A question like 'How many cats can you see?' presupposes that the animals that the students can see are cats and queries the exact number of the animals. Hence the cat is the core and the number of cats is what he teacher is going to talk about. Such a question therefore focuses the students' attention on the number of the animals. On the other hand, a question like 'What can you see in the picture?' will focus the students' attention on what animal they can see in the picture and implies that what they are seeing in the picture is not an exact number. The focus is not on the number, but on the fact that there is one or more than one animal in the picture. The teacher may use the animal name as the core and proceed to describe and discuss the concept of "some" easily. The first teacher however will encounter difficulty in discussing the concept of "some" as she has been focusing the students' attention on exact numbers for so long. This example shows how Questions framed in the classroom discourse determines the nature of learning.

STRATEGIES FOR USING LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM—ORAL AND WRITTEN

Oral work in classroom includes both listening and speaking. Communication cannot be made without listening comprehension. It has been said that listening and speaking go hand in hand. Thus a discussion on use of language through oral activities should include discussion of both listening and speaking activities.

Listening

The term listening, in language teaching, refers to a complex process that allows an individual to understand spoken language. As a linguistic skill listening is related to the other skills of speaking, reading and writing. The skill of listening is of great

importance because it is a critical means of acquiring the second language. It is a highly goal-oriented activity and involves both **bottom-up processing** (listeners attend to the data in the incoming speech signals) and **top-down processing** (listeners utilize their prior knowledge and expectations to create meaning). Both these processes take place at various levels of cognitive organization, namely, phonological, grammatical, lexical and propositional. Listening is thus a complex process which is often described as a 'parallel processing model of language understanding' (*Cowan*, 1995).

The skill of listening may be said to possess the following features:

(i) Recognize the characteristic English speech sounds, in isolation as well as in combination.

(ii) Distinguish such sounds from similar sounds in his mother tongue.

(iii) Understand the lexical meanings of words in context and grammatical meanings of structures.

(iv) Grasp the mood and attitude of the speaker and the theme of the discourse.

(v) Anticipate words and structures from the context for understanding speech at normal conversational speed.

(vi) Guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word from the context.

LISTENING TASKS

The listening tasks can be principally of two types:

(i) **Extensive:** The listening material may be lengthy, but the learner listens for pleasure and is not expected to note every tiny detail for completion of a specific task. Listening to radio broadcasts and TV programmes are popular methods of enhancing extensive listening. Such extensive listening may take place inside or outside the formal classroom settings.

(ii) **Intensive:** The learner listens very carefully and with full concentration. The listening material is short and the learner is expected to complete a special task or worksheet designed on the material. The material is designed in such

a way that the learner is motivated to note minute details for completion of the assigned task. Such a listening activity usually takes place within the formal classroom settings with the help of well designed, carefully graded and planned tasks. The material is usually compact and the learner is allowed to make short intermittent responses during the process.

Again based on the purpose of listening, the tasks can be classified as follows:

(i) **Listening for perception:** The learner must be able to perceive correctly the different sounds, stress and intonation patterns of the target language and thus the listening activity is focused on aural perception. In such activities comprehension is of secondary importance and no visual inputs are given, so that the learners are compelled to concentrate on the phonological aspects of the language. Listening for perception may be practiced in the formal classroom setting with the help of the following exercises:

(a) Use of tape recorders to make the learners repeat certain pronunciations, in tandem with prompt feedback.

(b) Preparation of necessary worksheet to enable the learners to differentiate sounds of various words. The teacher may also pronounce certain words that the learners would find from the given worksheet.

(c) Sentences may be uttered or recorded versions may be played in the card with stress being put on different words of the same sentence. The learners may be urged to identify the meanings conveyed by the sentence according to the stress laid down on the words. For instance, I want to do this (only I and not others want to do this)/I want to do this (a sense of urgency and determination)*I want* to do *this* (importance upon the task to be accomplished).

(d) Rising and falling tones may also be used to teach the learners to distinguish between various intonations.

(e) Picture activities are effective, where the teacher utters sentences or words and learners immediately identify the related pictures.

(f) Small texts may also be read allowed to enhance the listening perception of the learner.

(ii) **Listening for comprehension:** The listening material is based upon a particular context and the learner is given practice in specific areas of listening, according to his or her needs. Quick responses are an integral part of the listening exercise. An element of critical thinking and problem solving marks such a listening activity. The learners may be urged to respond to the instructions given by the teacher which calls for focused listening. The learners may also be urged to colour pictures or make designs according to the verbal instructions given by the teacher. Relevant worksheets may be handed out where the learners have to identify contexts uttered by the teacher in the class. The learners may also be asked to supply information in given grids with the help of summarization of the facts or concepts read out by the teacher.

(iii) **Listening for specific details:** This is listening with a purpose, a variant of intensive listening, in which every uttered sound is listened to attentively to locate specific details.

(iv) **Gist listening:** General lectures, speeches, seminars, conversations or talks are listened to with simultaneous critical thinking and reflection, in order to understand the gist or the thematic focus of the whole. Every minute detail may not be noted but the main points or the thematic crux of the entire speech is grasped.

(v) **Listening to identify emotion/attitude:** Learners listen to identify the mood and attitude of certain speakers.

(vi) **Listening to recognize context:** Learners listen to aural and contextual clues to identify where the conversation takes place, who is speaking, etc.

(vii) **Listening for inferring relationships:** Learners may be urged to listen to identify who the people are in the recording and what the relationship is between them.

Strategies for Developing Listening Skills

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

Top-down strategies are listener based. The listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include—

- listening for the main idea
- predicting
- drawing inferences
- summarizing

Bottom-up strategies are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include—

- listening for specific details
- recognizing cognates
- recognizing word-order patterns

Strategic listeners also use metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening.

- They plan by deciding which listening strategies will serve best in a particular situation.
- They monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies.
- They evaluate by determining whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals and whether the combination of listening strategies selected was an effective one.

Various planned materials and activities may be used to enhance the listening skills of the learners. The listening materials used in the formal language learning setting for enhancement of the listening skill are principally of three types:

(i) Authentic Listening Materials

(ii) Recorded Listening Materials

(iii) Live Listening Materials

Authentic listening materials signify real speech recorded in real life situations and may serve as a means of valuable exposure to the target language for the learners of second language. The pronunciation, stress or intonation in such cases are not planned, paced or artificially designed, but taken directly from real life and thus provide effective exercises in listening comprehension as well as sound perception. The different paces, repetitions, lack of clarity or the level of the language used may not be suitable for the level of the learners, and yet it provides scope of relevant exercise in listening skills since the learners get a taste of real life use of English and can train their ears accordingly. Recordings of Sports commentary, speeches, conversations, announcements made at railway stations or airports etc. may serve as valuable authentic listening materials.

Recorded listening materials are carefully planned and scripted by the language teacher according to the level of the learners. Learning materials designed in form of audio-CDs and worksheets provide planned exposure to the learners and are thus suitable to their age and needs. The range of accents and intonations are not haphazard but carefully designed and graded and thus allow better ear training needed for sound perception and listening comprehension. They also allow the learner to practice the listening skill at his/her own pace.

Live listening materials are the most widely used and perhaps the easiest mode of enhancing listening comprehension. The teacher himself/herself may serve as the source and hence may simplify, accelerate or slow down and modify the speech according to the needs of the learners. Scripted listening passages may be avoided and the teacher can create and recreate the listening material at his/her will according the immediate needs of the learners. However the listening material produced in any form must be a model for hearing and there should not be over emphasis on the content or text. The materials are mostly graded on the basis of lexical and structural difficulty to facilitate optimal listening comprehension and sound perception for the learners.

Various activities designed to promote listening skills may be summarized as follows:

- **Dictation:** It is one of the oldest and most common listening exercises where the teacher may plan a host of meaningful and effective activities to incite active participation of the learners. Dictating from graded texts is a common practice, but several modifications have been achieved on the basis of this exercise. *John Morgan* and *Rinvolucri* (1983) shows an interesting mode in which the teacher dictates a series of words at a considerably fast pace. The learners naturally fail to grasp each and every word and write down the words they have been able to grasp. They are then urged to develop a story from these. The teacher may also dictate parts of stories to different groups of learners with each group again dictating to each other. In this way all the groups get the full story partially from the teacher and partially from the learners. This enhances the listening skill of the learners.

- **Dialogue as spoken aloud or recorded:** The teacher speaks aloud or plays a recorded version of a conversation and then provides worksheets with the lines with missing parts, that the learners have to fill up from what they have heard.

- **Listening to telephone call and writing messages:** The learners may be exposed to telephonic conversations, mostly recorded and urge to write messages on the basis of what they hear.

- **Following verbal instructions:** the learners may be urged to acct out the various verbal instructions provided by the teacher or the audio inputs.

- **Listening and following a route:** Verbal dictations are given to learners who are urged to create a route map on the basis of the instructions.

- **Listening to audio clips and reporting to peers:** A section of the learners may be allowed to listen to audio clip and then return to the rest and narrate what they have heard. The listeners are then allowed to listen to the original clip and find out possible gaps and errors.

- **Jigsaw Listening:** Learners are divided into groups and are allowed to listen to parts of a whole story. Each group is allowed to listen to different parts. Then some members from each group are sent to other groups and are encourage to ask questions to collect then missing links in the story. After that they return to their original groups and discuss the collected components to create an intelligible coherent whole. Each group may be assisted by the teacher finally.
- Texts taught in class are scripted and learners are assigned roles with specific lines. They are paired and the partner is urged to listen to the spoken line and respond instantaneously on the basis of what he hears and understands.
- **Listening to mark a ground plan:** Learners may be urged to mark a ground plan for any school event on the basis of verbal instructions provided by the teacher.
- The learners may be divided into groups and each group may be given a different listening task (e.g. different questions). Then their answers may be swapped and the learners are made to listen again and check their classmates' answers.

All the strategies discussed above must be planned by the teacher with certain parameters in mind. The listening activity must be constructed around a contextualized task. Contextualized listening activities approximate real-life tasks and give the listener an idea of the type of information to expect and what to do with it in advance of the actual listening. A beginning level task would be locating places on a map (one way) or exchanging name and address information (two way). At an intermediate level learners could follow directions for assembling something (one way) or work in pairs to create a story to tell to the rest of the class (two way).

Each activity should have as its goal the improvement of one or more specific listening skills. A listening activity may have more than one goal or outcome, but be careful not to overburden the attention of beginning or intermediate listeners.

Recognizing the goal(s) of listening comprehension in each listening situation will help learners select appropriate listening strategies.

- **Identification:** Recognizing or discriminating specific aspects of the message, such as sounds, categories of words, morphological distinctions
- **Orientation:** Determining the major facts about a message, such as topic, text type, setting
- **Main idea comprehension:** Identifying the higher-order ideas
- **Detail comprehension:** Identifying supporting details
- **Replication:** Reproducing the message orally or in writing

The level of difficulty of the listening text must be assessed before exposing the learners to it.

The activities chosen during pre-listening may serve as preparation for listening in several ways. During pre-listening the teacher may

- assess learners' background knowledge of the topic and linguistic content of the text
- provide learners with the background knowledge necessary for their comprehension of the listening passage or activate the existing knowledge that the learners possess
- clarify any cultural information which may be necessary to comprehend the passage
- make learners aware of the type of text they will be listening to, the role they will play, and the purpose(s) for which they will be listening
- provide opportunities for group or collaborative work and for background reading or class discussion activities

Sample pre-listening activities are as follows:

- looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs
- reviewing vocabulary or grammatical structures
- reading something relevant
- constructing semantic webs (a graphic arrangement of concepts or words showing how they are related)
- predicting the content of the listening text
- going over the directions or instructions for the activity
- doing guided practice

While-listening activities relate directly to the text, and learners do them do during or immediately after the time they are listening:

- Learners need to devote all their attention to the listening task and so one must be sure they understand the instructions for the written task before listening begins so that they are not distracted by the need to figure out what to do.
- Writing must be kept to a minimum during listening. The primary goal being comprehension and not production, compulsion to write while listening may distract learners from this primary goal.
- Organization of activities so that they guide listeners through the text. Global activities such as getting the main idea, topic are to be combined and matched with selective listening activities that focus on details of content and form.
- Use of questions to focus learners' attention on the elements of the text crucial to comprehension of the whole is important. Before the listening activity begins, have learners review questions they will answer orally or in writing after listening. Listening for the answers will help learners recognize the crucial parts of the message.
- The learners may be urged to review what they are hearing to see if it makes sense in the context of their prior knowledge and what they already know of the topic or events of the passage.

Sample while-listening activities

- listening with visuals
- filling in graphs and charts
- following a route on a map
- checking off items in a list
- listening for the gist
- searching for specific clues to meaning
- completing cloze (fill-in) exercises
- distinguishing between formal and informal registers

Post-listening activities

This is conducted after the learners have completed the listening activity and speaking or writing skills may be ideally integrated with listening skill in this phase.

- Learners may be urged to compare their notes and discuss what they understood in pairs or small groups.
- The learners may be urged to respond to what they heard and encourage debate.
- The teacher may tell pairs to write a summary of the main points and then have them compare their summaries and check if they covered all the main points.
- The recording may be played again and again and the teacher may tell learners to call out 'Stop!' when they hear the answers they were listening for.
- The learners may be put into groups and told to make a list of comprehension questions to ask each other.
- The learners may be told to make a list in their notebooks of any new vocabulary they feel is useful.

SPEAKING

Speaking in a second language involves the development of a particular type of verbal communication skill. Oral language tends to differ from written language in grammatical, lexical and discursive patterns. Some of the skills needed in speaking are essentially different from those needed for reading or writing. The learning of spoken language involves the mastery of not only vocabulary and syntax, but also the phonological and phonetic pattern. In other words, sounds of a language, their arrangement in specific structures, prosodic features like stress, pitch etc. enjoy position of central significance in spoken English. Spoken English also serve as an index to the speaker's personality, his physical and mental state and the regional or social influences. In second language teaching learning reading and writing are ideally preceded by listening and speaking exercises. Effectiveness of a language lesson is often judged by the ratio of the Learner Speaking Time (PST) to the Teacher's Speaking Time (TST) in a given period. Greater PST denotes greater effectiveness.

Components

An individual usually possess the following abilities for speaking correctly in English. These have been called specific components of the skill:

(i) The learner can produce the characteristic English speech sounds and sound patterns, both in isolation and in combination.

(ii) The learner can use appropriate stress and intonation patterns

(iii) The learner is able to use appropriate words and structures to express the intended meaning

(iv) The learner can recall words and structures quickly

(v) The learner can organize his thoughts and ideas in logical sequence

(vi) The learner is able to adjust his speech according to his audience, situation and subject matter.

Characteristic features of an effective lesson on speaking skill

Speaking skill should ideally be taught in accordance with the needs of the learners. The learners must be provided adequate opportunities of communication and consequently communicating language teaching and task based learning have gained importance. Some of the important aspects of planning and organizing effective oral skill lessons may be summarized in the following manner:

(i) The task selected for teaching speaking skill must be simple, but with a sense of purpose and direction.

(ii) The task selected must be interesting, explanatory and directive.

(iii) The task must be planned according to the mental age and intellectual level of the learner.

(iv) While preparing the task the teacher must try to blend in the various study skills and avoid any complexity associated with typing, duplicating and recording.

(v) Carefully prepared tasks and planning and preparation on the part of the teacher are essential.

(vi) The task must encourage critical thinking and reflection among the learners.

(vii) The task should allow ample scope for presentations, reports or some sort of tangible verbal output, which helps the learners to focus on what has to be done and also provides a basis for prompt feedback.

(viii) The tasks should help the learner in engaging in creative endeavours.

(ix) The chosen tasks must be interactive and open ended in nature, that is, they must provide adequate opportunity to the learners for brainstorming and imaginative ventures.

(x) The interest level of the learners must be kept up by a well planned combination of intellectual challenge and high probability of success.

(xi) The oral skills activity should be carefully designed around the experience of the learners with occasional elements of the unfamiliar.

(xii) The learners may be divided into very small manageable groups for optimal interaction.

(xiii) If group work fails due to lack of proper organization, the teacher may form groups of four by asking learners to turn around and face their peers behind. Frequent changes in the groups should be avoided as such changes in partners may lead to anxiety and restlessness among the young learners.

(xiv) Prompt feedback from the teacher as well as collection of feedback from the learners at the end of the lesson is equally important in enhancing the oral activities.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILL

Development of oral skill in second language teaching has received considerable scholarly attention since one of the ultimate objectives of any language lesson is to enable the learner to communicate effectively in the target language. Thus various oral tasks related to the real life situations of the learner have been systematically designed to enhance the speaking skill of the learners. All these tasks are centred around the practical needs of the learner and aimed at enabling the learner to interact competently and appropriately at different levels and different

situations. Some of the common strategies or activities designed for this purpose are as follows:

(i) Chorus drills: These are often treated as effective techniques for providing oral practice in overcrowded classrooms and are effective in enhancing pronunciation through imitative repetition. Chorus drills also encourage shy learners and have been proved to be motivating for lower classes due to a ritualistic nature. In some cases bench-wise drills, followed by individual drills are also practiced.

(ii) Substitution drill: This may be of various types namely, single substitution drill, double and multiple substitution drills. This may be done individually or in groups.

(iii) Transformation drill: Learners are given a drill in transformation of sentences.

(iv) Integration drill: Learners are given a drill in integration of sentences.

(v) Contextualized drill: Appropriate contexts may be generated with the help of pictures and such contexts may be utilized for the drill of grammatical items. Such contexts may also be generated with the help of the learners' knowledge of current issues.

(vi) Pair work and group work: Pair work and group work constitute an important part of any communicative activity. Dialogues and conversations practiced by learners in pairs and groups in formal classroom settings enhance communicative competence.

(vii) Role play: Role play is a popular technique which can be of the following types—

(a) *With clues given:* Learners are urged to script and enact certain roles with basic clues supplied in the classroom.

(b) *Guided by the teacher:* The teacher guides the learners in enacting and speaking like particular characters from within or outside the text.

(c) *Independent type:* The learners are given complete freedom in selecting and enacting certain roles in the classroom. Such an exercise involves active communication.

(viii) Reaching consensus: The learners are urged to imagine situations and interact among themselves in the target language to come up with the final solution. For instance, they may be urged to imagine that they are going on an educational tour and are asked to make a list of the necessary items that they must carry. They are engaged in group discussions in the target language to come up with final list that they achieve by reaching a consensus. Such activities promote independent, motivated and spontaneous exercises in speaking skill.

(ix) Moral dilemma: Any topic may be selected from the given text or from current issues and the learners may be urged to express their independent views and critical reflections. They have to justify their views and this gives ample scope for speaking exercises. This may also be done in groups.

(x) Relaying instructions: The class may be divided into groups with one group possessing the complete information for completion of a task. This group is given the responsibility of replaying the instructions to the others and this may be done in turns.

(xi) Storytelling: It is "the most ancient and compelling of human activities" (*Morgan & Rinvolucri*, 1983) and has a special role to play in developing speaking skills. Simple storytelling by the learners in the target language may be complemented by a host of related activities that enhance the communicative competence of the learners. Some of them are—

(a) *Use of theme pictures:* The teacher may tell a story and then spreads related pictures on the table, urging the learners to choose any picture which they associate with the story. Each learner is then urged to justify his/her choice in the target language.

(b) *Skeleton stories:* The learners may be given the skeleton form or the bare outlines of a story in simple English and then the learners may be asked to give their versions of the story in the target language. The skeletal form of the story must be such that it may be interpreted in more than one ways.

(c) *Incomplete stories:* The teacher may begin a story but leave it half way for the learners to complete in their own ways in the target language. In some cases, only an intriguing open-ended first line is provided to the learners, who then narrate a story on their own, on the basis of the first line.

(d) *Use of sound sequences/sound scripts:* In this activity the teacher plays a recorded sound sequence while the learners listen carefully. The learners then speak on their interpretation of the story. This may be done in groups where each group member narrates his/her version with the group finally selecting the most interesting one and deputing one storyteller from the group to tell the story to the whole class. The teacher may help the learners by asking some questions after playing the audio clip. An interesting example from Sounds Intriguing by *Alan Maley* & *Alan Duff* (1975) projected a sound script of "cries—snapping—rustling—shouting—steps in water—barking—shot—silence—low whisper—silence". Some of the possible questions as given in the book where "What is the first sound you hear?/Is all the action happening in the same place?/What is the explanation of the sudden loud noise at the end of the sequence?" etc.

(xii) **Dictation:** Dictation is integrated with an oral activity in many ways. A set of words may be dictated to the class and each learner may grasp a few of them. Now each learner is urged to develop and narrate a story based on the words they remember. The words dictated at a fast pace must ideally be rich in content and stimulate thinking.

(xiii) **Telling anecdotes:** Anecdotes are naturally appealing to the learners and help in breaking the drudgery of everyday learning experiences. Both the teacher and the learner can share anecdotes from their life in the target language. The teacher may also provide topics for anecdotes closely related to the daily life of the learners to be narrated in the target language.

(xiv) **Picture composition:** The teacher may draw an incomplete picture on the blackboard and urge the learners to instruct the teacher to add more details to the picture and then tell their version of the story to the rest of the class. Such an activity gives ample scope of exercise in the speaking skill and enhances the confidence levels of the learners.

(xv) **Debate:** Topics related to the learner's life may be selected for a debate in the class. The learners argue in the target language and the teacher gives weightage for content, ideas, intonations, pronunciations and effective speech.

(xvi) **Simulation of radio or TV shows:** Learners may be urged to play the role of news readers and anchors. They may also be asked to coordinate a whole show, complete with music, interviews, advertisements etc.—all done in the target language. The teachers may show recorded samples to give them a basic idea and grant full autonomy to the learners to design and coordinate their show. This is an interesting way of enhancing critical thinking, organizing abilities and speaking skills.

All the strategies of enhancing speaking skills as discussed above must be centered around the following principles:

(i) Learners should speak the language in meaningful situations.

(ii) There should be sufficient repetition and variety to facilitate habit formation without creating boredom in the class.

(iii) Correction should be selective and should mainly be based on drilling in the correct form. Persistent crucial errors should be dealt with in a separate remedial lesson.

(iv) Speaking activities should be properly graded to suit the level of the learners.

(v) The ultimate aim of all oral drills is to enable the learners to make a free choice in an actual communication situation. Therefore, once the learners have mastered a structure, they should practice it in situations where their attention is focused on the thread of meaning rather than on the structure.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING WRITING

Writing is a useful mode of organizing thoughts and expressing them with precision and clarity. In fact though all the four linguistic skills are integrated in actual communication, writing and speaking are considered to be the two expressive modalities of language. Writing involves both auditory and visual skills and is usually taught after the learner has developed considerable efficiency in the speaking and reading skills. Writing has to be developed as a skill since it does not come spontaneously and naturally. The skill of writing also demands accuracy in grammar, lexicon and structure. It is a visual representation of human thoughts and speech, but more complex than the speaking skill, since it involves a conscious learning of various lexical and syntactic conventions.

In the 1970s writing in most English second language classes was mostly a lesson in grammar with the pedagogy reflecting elements of the audio-lingual method. In the early 1980s a shift from incremental and controlled writing to guided writing was noticed. Gradually grammatical accuracy was rendered secondary to communication and the second language composition exercises focussed more on the teaching of organization patterns common in English academic prose. During the 1980s writing was perceived as a part of the "expressive approach" and was taught as a mode of self discovery and spontaneous self expression. The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the evolution of learner centred strategies and writing was perceived as a communicative social act. The purpose of writing is not only to communicate to a wider audience, even those not present at the moment within the limitations of specific spatial boundaries, but is also an important tool used to fix the structures and vocabulary already taught. Writing has been treated as a Process, Product and Genre.

Components of writing skill

Some of the important components of the writing skill may be summarized in the following manner:

(i) Ability of writing alphabets at a reasonable speed
(ii) Ability to spell the words correctly

(iii) Ability of recalling appropriate words and using them in sentences
(iv) Ability to use appropriate punctuation marks
(v) Skill of linking sentences with appropriate sentence connectors and sequence signals like definite articles or pronouns
(vi) Organization of thoughts and ideas in logical sequence and in suitable paragraphs around certain topics
(vii) Evaluation of the significance of the words or a sentence in the overall context of the written passage
(viii) Skill of using the form and register appropriate for the subject matter and the reader

Process of Writing

The process of writing may be divided into three stages which correspond to recognition, structuring and interpretation in reading. They are

(i) Manipulation: It is the most preliminary stage of writing and consists in the psycho-motor ability to form letters of the alphabet. For second language learners manipulation does not pose a serious challenge because by the time the learners attempt writing the English letters, they have developed adequate muscular control through their writing practices in vernacular. Manipulation must be systematic to promote legibility and maintenance of Graphemic Contrasts, or the contrasts between the individual letters. The teacher usually makes the learners aware of the distinguishing features in apparently identical letters and exercise in writing similar letters in distinct groups, proves to be a common ad effective practice. Manipulation apparently focuses on—(a) uniformity of the size of the individual letters (b) uniformity of the spaces between the letters and (c) uniformity of the direction and the angle of slant of the letters. Practice in the imitation of models followed by critical appreciation of one's own work for improvement, are crucial for effective manipulation.

(ii) Structuring: The learner is taught to organize the letters into words, words into phrases and phrases into sentences. Intensive oral exercise preceding writing, facilitates structuring.

(iii) Communication: Ultimately the learner is expected to develop the ability to select appropriate structures and vocabulary suitable for the context of the passage to be written as well as catering to the needs of the prospective reader. Intensive practice, experience, attentive and sustained critical appreciation of model writing and an adequate proficiency in the various conventions used in written language, are necessary prerequisites for developing such communicative efficacy through writing.

Sub-skills of Writing

There are a set of well defined sub-skills that the learners must acquire for enhancing their skill of writing. These are—

• *Mechanics—*	Handwriting, spelling, punctuation
• *Word choice—*	Vocabulary, idiom, tone
• *Organization—*	Paragraphs, topic and support cohesion and unity
• *Syntax—*	Sentence structure, sentence boundaries, stylistic choices
• *Grammar—*	Rules for verb agreement, articles, pronouns etc.
• *Content—*	Relevance, clarity, originality, logic etc.
• *The writing process—*	Getting ideas, getting started, writing drafts, revising
• *Purpose—*	The reason for writing, justification

Strategies for Teaching Writing

Writing must be simple, clear, meaningful and coherent in order to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation of ides. Some basic aspects that must be taken care of while teaching writing may be summarized as follows:

(i) Language—
   (a) Use of correct and consistent spelling
   (b) Appropriate use of grammar and syntax
   (c) Accurate and wide range of vocabulary
   (d) Appropriate style and tone
   (e) Clarity of purpose

(ii) Organization and layout—
   (a) Relevance of the text written
   (b) Effective organization of content
   (c) Logical links between successive sentences or sections
   (d) Appropriate punctuation marks
   (e) Coherence
   (f) Appropriate linking words and phrases

(iii) Clarity—
   (a) Appropriate coverage
   (b) Clear statement of ideas
   (c) Logical links between events
   (d) Sequential coherence

Keeping all these in view the teacher must devise organized activities for teaching the skill of writing. Writing exercises mostly boil won to exercises in composition which broadly signify arrangement of points in a certain order. The writing or composition tasks can be broadly of three types—

(i) Guided or controlled composition: Both content and expression are provided by the teacher and the learner is thus exposed to writing in a graded and systematic manner. Guided writing is a somewhat more flexible variant of controlled writing where the teacher provides appropriate hints to the learner, who then responds individually. The degree of control and guidance is progressively reduced as the learner develops proficiency in due course of time.

(ii) Free composition: learners with sufficient proficiency in structural and syntactic aspects of writing, select vocabulary and structures independently in order to express their thoughts.

(iii) Collaborative composition: Writing exercises in formal classroom settings are now carried out in groups and pairs to facilitate a sharing of ideas, expressions, editing skills and self correction to generate an acceptable and correct version of writing. This calls for organization, planning and management, but is effective in promoting writing skills through psychologically sound enjoyable activities.

In different types of composition or writing exercises some fundamental aspects are to be kept in mind for developing suitable strategies. They are—

(i) Generating awareness: An awareness about elements of standard writing, format and style is necessary and may be generated in the learners through some of the following strategies—

(a) Analyzing text to point out elements of good writing

(b) Analyzing text to point out the shortcomings and structural weakness

(c) Comparison of multiple texts in terms of style

(d) Ordering of jumbled sentences and paragraphs to create coherence

(e) Exercises in dividing a given text into sections to generate an awareness of contextual focus and sequence.

(ii) Providing support: After generating awareness about the fundamental characteristics of writing support may be given by the teacher to promote writing skills. Such planned support may be in the form of grammatical inputs, exercises in relevant vocabulary, elicitation of appropriate ideas and themes and effective guidelines.

(iii) Focussed practice procedures: The learners must be focussed on well planned drills in order to gain proficiency in the skill of writing. Some such activities may be in the form of taking and organizing notes, ordering of sentences and paragraphs to generate coherence, insertion of missing information into a given text or combining simpler sentences to make more complex and loaded articulations.

(iv) Advanced practises: Once the learners have gained proficiency through focussed practice, they must be encouraged to create texts from relevant prompts or in accordance with the model, gradually proceeding towards independent creation of logical, coherent, meaningful and creative writing.

(v) Vocabulary and grammar: For developing effective writing skills organization and stylistic choices must be complemented by sufficient knowledge of vocabulary and

grammatical norms. This may be achieved by specific exercises in the form of error correction, planned exposure of the learners to reference books, indicating selected words and grammatical uses in those books and discussions on the errors in a piece of writing. Feedback is of utmost importance and the teachers and learners may collaborate as co-writers in reviewing and rewriting selected pieces for prompt feedbacks and enhancement of the writing skill.

Some of the commonest forms of writing used extensively are given below. Graded exercises and planned strategies of teaching writing thus inevitably centre around most of the following.

(i) Dialogues: Should be ideally related to the real life situations of the learners. Use of abbreviations and colloquial expressions are allowed and incomplete sentences as used in real-life conversations are accepted. Apart from dialogue writing incomplete dialogues may also be provided for reconstruction of complete conversations. Group compositions may also be encouraged in which groups of learners may create a five minute drama on the basis of a given text or picture, which they enact in the classroom setting.

(ii) Letters: Letter writing constitute important communicative mode, especially in connecting with physically distant people in form of invitation, enquiry, complaint, application etc. Letters are principally of two types, namely formal and informal letters. Formal letters are written for business purposes while informal letters signify correspondence between friends, family and acquaintances. Apart from simple exercises in letter writing, other strategies for enhancing this skill may be employed in the form of jumbled up letters where the learner must reorganize sections for a coherent whole.

(iii) Reports: Reports are of several kinds like newspaper reports, academic or scientific reports, field reports, business reports etc. The elements encouraged in such exercises are brevity. completeness, lack of digression, accuracy, clarity, precision. inclusion of relevant details,

logical arrangement and lack of emotional or sentimental overtones. Writing reports on the basis of telephonic conversations, school celebrations, planning of school events, excursions, local events and campus journalism are some of the popular strategies for developing writing skill. Campus news bulletins are interesting ways of developing writing skills among the learners.

(iv) Paragraphs/essays: One of the most popular strategies for teaching writing since paragraph writing allows an effective exercise in continuous and coherent writing. Apart from the elements of unity, coherence and organization of ideas, creativity and critical thinking of the learners are also enhanced for advanced writing skill.

(v) Newspapers may also be used in innovative ways to teach writing. Front pages may be circulated and learners may be urged to jot down word s that they like the most. With the help of those words they would now be urged to write a coherent story on their own. They may also be asked to do the same with words jotted down on hearing any recorded piece or any piece narrated by the teacher. They may also be urged to ferret out and jot down words with positive or gloomy connotations and write sentences in accordance with the moods expressed by the individual words.

(vi) Diaries: Refers to a personal record and thus thoughts may be expressed in informal manner without strict adherence to rules of continuity. Exercises in diary writing boost the interest and motivation level of the learner. It also inspires independent thinking and is effective modes of teaching writing skills.

(vii) Picture Composition: *Andrew Wright* (1989) refers to a number of roles for pictures in teaching writing, including heightened motivation of the learners, interesting and relevant contextualisation, multiplicity of response-both subjective and objective.

DISCUSSION AS A TOOL FOR LEARNING

Discussion is a valuable and inspiring way of revealing the diversity of opinion that lies below the surface of any complex issue. Although there are multiple ways to learn, discussion is one of the best ways to explore significant questions and develop a fuller understanding of the multiplicity of human experience and knowledge. A topic is aid to come alive as diverse and complex opinions multiply in number (*Brookfield & Preskill*, 1999). Since discussion reveals and acknowledges multiplicity of perspectives, it has been described as a democratic process. It is believed to nurture and promote human growth. Discussion is said to facilitate what *John Dewey* (1916) described as 'the development of an ever-increasing capacity for learning and an appreciation of and sensitivity to learning undertaken by others'. Discussion is significant because it emphasizes acknowledgement of new points of view through collaboration and cooperation. Discussion also leads to the emergence of a collective wisdom through mutual understanding and exploration of multiple perspectives. Besides in remaining open to the unexpected, the participants in a discussion feel engaged and alive. So the importance of discussion is not only just moral or philosophical but also deeply personal and self-ratifying. *David Bridges* (1988) claims that discussion is different from general human conversation and other forms of group talk by its concern with the development of knowledge, understanding or judgment among those taking part. According to *Bridges* discussion involves participants who are mutually responsive to the different views expressed and are disposed to be affected by the opinions. *James Dillion* (1994) defines discussion as a 'highly disciplined and concerted talk' in which people come together to resolve some issue or problem that is important to them. Discussion, is thus, a process that incorporates reciprocity and movement, exchange and inquiry, cooperation and collaboration, formality and informality.

Purposes of Discussion

The purposes of discussion are principally fourfold. They are—

(i) To help the participants reach a more critical under-standing about the topic under consideration.

(ii) To enhance participants' self-awareness and their capacity for self-critique.

(iii) To foster an appreciation among the participants for the diversity of opinion that invariably emerges when viewpoints are exchanged openly and honestly.

(iv) To act as a catalyst to helping people take informed action in the world. Discussion is an important way for people to develop participatory skills that contributes to democracy in the long run.

Benefits of Discussion

Discussion is a very popular strategy adopted in classroom teaching. Merits of discussion that make it a significant strategy for teaching learning, are as follows:

(i) It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.

(ii) It increases the students' awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity.

(iii) It helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions.

(iv) It encourages attentive and respectful listening.

(v) It develops new appreciation for continuing differences

(vi) It increases intellectual agility.

(vii) It helps students become connected to a topic .

(viii) It shows respect for the students' voices and experiences

(ix) It helps students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.

(x) It affirms students as co-creators of knowledge.

(xi) It develops the capacity for clear communication of ideas and meanings.

(xii) It develops habits of collaborative learning.

(xiii) It increase breadth of vision and makes the students more empathetic.

(xiv) It helps the students to develop skills of synthesis and integration.

(xv) It leads to transformation.

DISCUSSION STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Discussion is one of the most effective ways to make students aware of the range of interpretations that are possible in an area of intellectual inquiry. Teachers can introduce diverse perspectives through lecturing or pre-reading activities but in such cases the students become passive recipients. Diversity of interpretations that can be made of the same apparently objective facts generate greater interest and participation if initiated among peers. It is believed that chances of lively discussions distinguished by interpretive diversity increase considerably if the participants are drawn from diverse social, ethnic and gender backgrounds; if they take a variety of ideological perspectives on common experiences and express their perceptions in different terms. Discussions that involve students to speak in different voices, express varied viewpoints and use different expressive forms, help the students to learn about the contested nature of knowledge. The students come to realize that there is rarely a single interpretation of an issue or a problem, but rather arrange of sustainable views, each of which may hold a legitimate claim on the participants. A discussion usually exhibits different ways of speaking and thinking and involves different cultural, class and gender experiences and thus exposes the students to different uses of language. Discussion is a very useful strategy to develop the students' ability to transcend miscommunication and mindfully comprehend the underlying meaning of human speech.

Discussion as a strategy promotes reflection and critical thinking. **Guided discussion**, i.e. discussion helped by the teacher is effective in enabling the students to listen properly, seek clarification and create opportunities for all voices to be heard. Engaging in a discussion requires a certain degree of intellectual agility and ability to react to unanticipated comments. Students know that what they say may be challenged or contradicted and thus they get mentally prepared to formulate counter-responses. This develops the ability of critical response and logical thinking.

Building connections, both personal and intellectual constitutes the core of any discussion. Ideas perceived as distant

or irrelevant when presented through a lecture become relevant and significant when one has to explore them through speech. When a teacher is introducing the students to a new topic, usually there is no inherent point of connection between students' experiences and the new topic of discussion. In such situations the teacher can help create this connection by asking students to participate in a discussion. The insights gained through discussions sometime connect directly to real life experiences. Discussions become a continuous spiral of action, reflection on action, further action and further reflection, as pointed out by *Freire* (1993).

The hierarchical experience of education is turned into a collaborative and respectful process in which individual experiences are recognized and valued. Discussion is mainly an analysis of experience, in an attempt to understand how individual experience is socially formed. Codified legitimated bookish knowledge is integrated logically and reflectively with individual and social experiences. ***Myles Horton & Freire*** (1990) assert that, 'people know the basic answers to their problems, but they need to go further than that, and you can, by asking questions and getting them stimulated coax them to move, in discussion, beyond their experience'. In the classroom discussion, students must be encouraged to subject their personal experiences to critical analysis in order to perceive alternative interpretations and new perspectives on those experiences.

Fostering democratic discourse in the classroom is not easy. Immediately after World War II, adult educator ***Edward Lindeman*** (1947) proposed eight democratic disciplines that, taken together, constituted a natural code of behaviour for a citizen living under democratic conditions. These disciplines included learning to live with diversity, learning to accept the partial functioning of democratic ideals, learning to avoid false antitheses, learning to ensure that means and ends are congruent, learning to value humour and learning to live with contrary decision and perspectives. ***Brookfield & Preskill*** (1999) assert that if discussions are introduced in the classroom and conducted carefully, the classrooms can become laboratories in which students will learn democratic habits through democratic principles being tried, adapted and reframed with a minimum

consequential threat for the participants. Through discussion **possibility of dialogue across differences** is increased and **effective use of language** in order to tackle difficulties in communication is naturally taught to the students. Discussions naturally train the students to communicate with clarity and precision and use analogical reasoning. The students become more adept at entering into other people's frames of reference and analysing an issue through multiple lenses. In responding to questions in the discussion, students learn to recognize those aspects of communication styles that create difficulties for others.

Preparation for Discussion

Students in most cases do not share a common understanding of the process of discussion. In many cases students actively resist discussion by staying silent or agreeing to their peers. For a successful use of the strategy of discussion in the class the teacher must follow certain steps, as discussed below.

(a) Ensuring early and equal access to relevant material. A prerequisite for group discussion is that participants should be as fully informed as possible about the topic under consideration. One way to achieve this is giving relevant handouts, introductory lectures or giving a list of study material available in the institutional library. The electronic location of necessary information may also be given to the students.

(b) Beginning every lecture with one or more questions that needs to be discussed. A teacher poses these questions at the outset of the introductory talk in order to inspire the spirit of inquiry aiming at a more comprehensive understanding of the matter. If the students get used to the teacher opening his introductory lectures by raising a series of questions, they would naturally be more accepting when the teacher frames discussions around a question or questions to be explored.

(c) Ending every lecture with a series of questions that the lecture has raised or left unanswered.

(d) Deliberately introducing periods of silence. A barrier to a good discussion is the general belief that conversation means continuous talk. Periods of reflective silence are

integral to good discussion and students must be made aware of the fact that they should not feel pressurized to fill the short periods of reflective silence with speech.

(e) Preparing students for periods of reflective silence. The teacher can tell the students that reflective silence is significant for intense engagement with the subject of discussion. After every twenty minutes of uninterrupted discussion, students may take three to five minutes of silence reflective speculations. Students may be made to write down the important points and the areas of doubt located in the post twenty minutes. After the period of silent reflection students may share the ideas in groups and proceed with the discussion under the supervision of the teacher.

(f) Deliberately introducing alternative perspectives. The teacher may participate in the discussion introducing variety of alternative ideas and perspectives in order to break the unilineal progression of the discussion and make it more animated.

(g) Introducing periods of assumption hunting. One of the purposes of discussion is to encourage critical thinking, which involves students in identifying and scrutinizing the assumptions that inform their ideas and actions. The teacher may guide the students by introducing periods of assumption hunting into introductory lectures. These are moments when the students should stop professing what they believe and rather try to locate the assumptions on which such beliefs rest. The students would also be encouraged to investigate the validity of such assumptions. This prepares them for the practice of critical scrutiny which helps in a meaningful discussion.

(h) Introducing buzz groups into lectures. Students may be initiated to the habit of discussion by participating in brief buzz group sessions during lectures. A buzz group is usually made up of three to four students who are given a few minutes once or twice during the lesson to discuss a question or an issue that arises. The teacher may frame questions to inspire the students to make some judgements

regarding the relative merits, relevance or usefulness of the constituent elements of the lecture. Some examples of such questions are—

• What is the most important point that has been made in the lecture so far?

• What is the most contentious statement you have heard so far in the class today?

• Of all the ideas and points you have heard so far today, which is the most obscure and ambiguous to you?

• In the buzz groups students may discuss and take turns giving a brief response to the question asked and should note if any one response draws particular agreement or produces significant conflict. A focussed buzz group actually gets the students involved in meaningful discussions without the students realizing what is happening.

(i) Using **critical incident questionnaire.** One of the strongest facts about discussion is that students learn to use language in critical and democratic ways by observing people in authority. A teacher is the most commonly followed personality in the class. A teacher can use a **critical incident questionnaire** (CIQ) which is a simple classroom evaluation tool used to find out what and how students are learning. It usually consists of a sheet of paper with attached carbon. Containing five questions, all of which focus on critical moments or actions in the class, as judged by the students. Space is provided beneath each question for the students' response. This may be handed out to the students ten minutes before the end of the last class of the week and the students may keep the carbon copies of their responses to review at their leisure and notice habitual preferences, dispositions and points of avoidance in their learning. The teacher may use the responses to initiate animated discussions on the same and promote critical thinking. Some of the common questions used in the CIQ are—

• At what moment in class this week were you most engaged as a student and why?

- At what moment in the class this week were you most distanced as a learner and why?
- What portion of the lesson this week did you find ambiguous or confusing and what clarification do you seek?
- What surprised you the most about the class this week and why?

(j) Engaging in discussion with the students without any barrier. The teacher holds a position of authority in the classroom and often communicates in an overly academic manner. If the teacher mingles with the students freely and participates in the discussion using colloquial language and familiar metaphors, the process of discussion would proceed with great facility.

(k) Development of ground rules for conducting discussions. Rules of conduct and codes of behaviour are important in determining whether students take discussions seriously. Ground rules for discussions must be set, preferably based upon the students' most vivid recollections of their experiences as discussion participants. Ground rules are rules that mist be followed to ensure that the discussion is a meaningful, useful, respectful and worthwhile experience for all participants.

(l) Using video-taped discussion vignettes. The students may be shown excerpts from bad discussions and urged to jot down the reason behind apparent unacceptability of the various comments, contributions and actions shown in the videotape. They may be urged to critically discuss about the bad discussions and suggest improvements. In this way the students are initiated into productive and meaningful discussions that help in meaningful learning in the long run.

(m) Introducing the students to structured, critical pre-reading. An important prerequisite of a good discussion for meaningful learning is serious and critical pre-reading of materials. It is however difficult to make all the students read the materials and so the teacher may begin by selecting and providing structured pre-reading material,

centred around a set of critical questions related to the lesson they are going to learn, but questions without any immediately clear resolution or answer. This may mentally stimulate the students to go through the material and think about it, which would generate interest about the lesson and lead to meaningful learning.

(n) Making the students aware of a protocol for critical reading. Critical reading can happen only when readers do the following—

- Make explicit assumptions authors hold about what constitute legitimate knowledge and how such knowledge comes to be known.
- Take alternative perspectives on the knowledge being offered so that this knowledge comes to be seen as culturally constructed.
- Undertake positive and negative appraisals of the grounds for and expression of this knowledge.
- Analyse commonly held ideas for the extent to which they support or oppose various ideologies.

A teacher may explain these protocols to the students and as them to read the text accordingly.

(o) Introducing the students to epistemological questions. While reading a text and discussing on it the students should be able to address questions that probe how an author comes to know something is true. These are epistemological questions which a student must be habituated to for a successful use of discussion as a tool for learning. Some example of epistemological questions are—

- To what extent does the writing seem biased?
- To what extent is the description presented in a clumsy and inaccurate way?
- To what extent are the central insights presented in the text grounded in documented empirical evidence?

(p) Introducing the students to experiential questions. While discussing about a text students must be able to develop questions that help them to review the text through the lens of their own relevant experiences. The teacher must

develop such a habit of thinking among the students to sue discussion as an effective tool for learning. Some examples are—

- If the text addresses experiences with which you are familiar, to what extent are these congruent with or contradicted by your own experiences?
- What experiences are omitted from the text that strike you as important?

(q) Introducing the students to communicative questions. To imitate a discussion that would help him transacting a lesson in the class effectively, the teacher must develop a frame of mind among the students so that they can think about the author's strategy of conveying meaning and the effectiveness of the forms chosen by the author. Such questions are called communicative questions. Some examples of such questions are—

- To what extent does the text use a form of specialized language that is unjustifiably distant from colloquial language?
- To what extent is the text connected to practice?
- To what extent is the text help in solving problems?

(r) Clarification of expectations and purposes. Teachers must justify to students why discussions are being held in a class and clarify that students would not be humiliated under any circumstances so that they participate freely and think critically. This helps in inspiring the students who might otherwise feel that discussions are wastage of precious time and barriers to successful completion of the syllabus.

(s) Inserting discussion as an important element of the syllabus.

(t) Showing video clips of animated discussion on contemporary issues to the students. To give an idea about critical thinking and logical progression of discourse in a good discussion selected video clips may be shown to the students and it may be explained how they should take up issues and proceed step by step, analysing and responding critically.

Starting Discussion

Easy flow of conversation and logical argument is not easily achieved in a typical classroom situation. Some effective ways of opening up a discussion that concentrate the students' attention on the theme and that models a democratic process, are discussed below.

(a) Discussion should not be started with the teacher giving a lecture in which all the important points, possible perspectives and personal concerns are summarized.

(b) Discussion should never be initiated by posing vague or general questions like what do you think or who wants to start speaking.

(c) Discussions should never be started with the extrovert and studious students urged to speak up. The other students lose their desire to participate since they predict that the usual suspects will speak up, and majority of the students then become passive mentally.

(d) Initial silence is to be tolerated. At the start of a discussion there may be periods of silence as the students may take time to settle into the new intellectual project. *Palmer* (1993) points out, "we need to abandon the notion that nothing is happening when it is silent to see how much new clarity a silence often brings."

(e) A classroom speech policy should be declared. Many students from working class backgrounds, female students, minority groups, first generation learners or students with special needs generally approach discussion sessions with diffidence and a justifiable sense of distrust. In the prevalent educational system they get to believe that a good student would have the ability to spring confidently into speech at the earliest possible opportunity, and thus they feel that they are not competent enough due to limited linguistic competence. The teacher can briefly talk about the power of silence and the students' right to speak out their minds without any fear of public embarrassment. The teacher may be emphasize the importance if participation in class discussion, and clarify that the volume of eloquence is not important.

(f) The teacher should organize the discussion around questions raised by the students and then allow the discussion to proceed freely.

(g) Students may be asked to choose a concrete image. For students who are visual rather than auditory learners **Frederick** (1986) and **Van Mentes** (1990) suggest asking students to choose a specific image that is suggested by the text they have read. No analysis is required initially, but recollections and brief descriptions must be asked for. As each student reports the collective images are listed on the blackboard, providing a visual record of selected content from the text as a necessary backdrop to the discussion. Usually such a recall of concrete scenes prompts further recollection and a flood if images flow from the students.

(h) The discussion may be grounded in a debriefing of the critical incident questionnaire responses used in the preparatory session.

(i) Discussion may be initiated with a strong, provocative or even inflammatory statement that usually challenges the assumptions that students take for granted.

(j) Discussion may be initiated to choose quotes or information from a text that they wish to affirm and quotes or information that they wish to challenge.

(k) Personal experiences may be used effectively for lively discussions. However the teacher must make it clear that there should be logic, reasoning and critical reflection in presentation of personal experiences.

(l) Circular response discussions. The habit of attentive listening is very important for successful discussion. The circular response exercise is a way to democratize participation, promote continuity and give the students some experience of the efforts required in respectful listening. This technique was popularized by **David Stewart** (1987). In this process, students sit in a circle and each person takes turn to talk about a given issue for two to three minutes. The speakers are not free to say

anything they want, and must make a brief summary of the preceding speaker's message and use that as a springboard for new comments. This is to say that what each speaker articulates depends greatly on listening well to the preceding speaker as well as on generating new ideas. In circular response, no one can prepare remarks ahead of time because what each person says depends on paying careful attention to the words of the preceding speaker. This exercise gives the students a practice in participating in discussions where collective and cumulative understanding is more important than the contribution of any one individual. This helps in a detailed analysis of the lesson and hence contributes to meaningful learning.

(m) Ensuring equal participation is necessary, though mandating speech may seem like an exercise of teacher power that violates the democratic spirit of discussions. In Teaching to Transgress, **Bell Hooks** (1994) describes how she mandates students to read out paragraphs from their journals in the class so that no one feels silenced or marginalized. According to her this is a responsible and necessary exercise of power.