Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners

FOURTH EDITION

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Dictoglos
Improving Listening and Communication Skills

A dictoglos is a strategy developed by Ruth Wajnryb (1990) for use with high school students, but it can be adapted for use with students of all ages. It is especially effective with English language learners because the strategy focuses on fluent academic language and supports learners in listening and recalling good English language models (Gibbons, 1993).

A dictoglos involves students in listening to repeated, fluent readings of English text. At first they just listen, but on subsequent readings they take down as much of the text as possible. They then get together in pairs and again in groups of four to combine their notations and re-create as much of the text as possible. The activity provides an authentic reason for communication and practice in re-creating, rewriting, and rereading English text.

**Step-by-Step**

The steps in teaching a dictoglos lesson are the following:

- **Select an appropriate piece of text**—Select a content-related text and read it aloud at a normal speaking pace. At first, instruct students to “just listen carefully.”

- **Reread the text orally**—Read the text twice more. The students are now instructed, “Jot down key words and phrases.”

- **Pair to re-create the text**—Have students work in pairs to re-create as much of the text as possible using the notes taken by each of the partners. Instruct them to write the text as closely as possible to the original text as read by the teacher.

- **Work in groups of four**—Have two pairs meet together and pool their re-creations of the text to reconstruct it more completely. Have the group of four work together to write down as much of the text as possible. Their aim is to re-create it as closely as possible to the original.

- **Read the re-created text**—Ask one member of each group to read the group’s re-creation of the text and ask the other groups to see how closely it matches their versions. Display the groups’ re-created texts, and compare and discuss them, noting the sections in the text that were difficult to re-create.
Assessment to Ensure Effective Instruction

Have the students self-evaluate their listening skills by making copies of the final re-created text and asking each student to highlight the parts they contributed or remembered. Each student can make a personal bar graph to show how much they improve each time you do a dictoglos activity. In order to do this, you will have to determine the main ideas in each dictoglos and then have the students graph according to percentages. If there were 10 main ideas in the dictoglos and the student remembered 8 of them, the student graphs it as 80 percent. As each new dictoglos is completed, students can graph the progress they make. See Figure 41.1 for an example of a bar graph recording a student’s dictoglos progress.

Applications and Examples

Theory to Practice Connection
A dictoglos provides a perfect opportunity for practice in listening, oral communication, and negotiation of meaning in a small-group setting. These factors all contribute to the English learner’s ability to participate successfully in creating meaning (Swain, 1993).

Because Laura Ingalls Wilder is one of her students’ favorite authors, Ms. Leonard reads aloud from Carol Greene’s biography of Wilder (1990) to her third-grade class. Reading the excerpt from the book in which Greene describes how Wilder got ideas for her books, Ms. Leonard instructs the students to listen carefully so they will be able to remember Ms. Greene’s words.

The second and third time she reads the text aloud, Ms. Leonard asks the students to jot down key words and phrases so they can recall the author’s exact words. Ms. Leonard then pairs the students, instructing them to put their notes together so that they can rewrite the text in Greene’s voice. Once they have a text written that combines the words each pair was able to recall, the students meet again in groups of four to try to make their text even more complete. Once the groups are satisfied with the text they have re-created, they are instructed to use the text and illustrations to make a big book.

Each group of four is given time to present their big book to the class. The groups then discuss the sections of the text that were easiest to recall and compare and contrast the text of the big books. The groups agree that they used more colorful language in the writing of their big books because they were trying to use Carol Greene’s exact words instead of their own.

A dictoglos is an exciting strategy because it gives students a chance to explore literary and academic language in depth. It exposes students to spoken and written English at a level above the everyday spoken English they hear and gives them practice in listening and writing more formal English. This strategy can be used in many curricular areas.
Mr. Estes teaches 10th-grade humanities. In celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Mr. Estes decides to use a dictoglos to support his students in listening to and appreciating Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. The students listen first, and then take notes during the second and third readings so that they can re-create the speech. He has them meet in pairs—carefully placing English learners with strong English-fluent models—to combine their notes, and then meet in groups of four to refine the rewriting of the speech. Lively discussion erupts as they struggle to remember the eloquent words. Discussion of the meaning of the literary language is heard throughout the room. At the conclusion of the lesson, one student from each group delivers the group's version of the speech with dramatic flourish. Although the words are not all exactly right, each group has demonstrated its understanding of the message.

Conclusion

A dictoglos is a strategy that can be adapted for use in many different ways. Figure 41.2 shows the ways in which it can be used for different ages of students and in different curricular areas.

A dictoglos is more than a valuable as a strategy for exposing students to fluent, literary English—it is also an exciting way to help them study language and its changes over time. By listening to pieces of literature written in different time periods, students become aware of the ways English vocabulary and usage have changed over the years and of the influence of different linguistic groups on the language of the time. The context of the language can also be emphasized so the students begin to appreciate how the choices of words and phrasing are influenced by the purpose of the text or speech and the audience for which it is intended.

**FIGURE 41.2** Adaptations of a Dictoglos for Different Ages and Curricular Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Adaptations</th>
<th>Curricular Areas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Recite poems and fingerplays, and write their notes interactively</td>
<td>Language arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Paragraphs describing content knowledge—re-create and illustrate</td>
<td>Science, social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Elementary</td>
<td>Literary excerpts, famous speeches, and historical documents such as the Constitution</td>
<td>Language arts, social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Descriptions of procedures, historical literature linking writing to periods of history, literary language—link to art, music</td>
<td>Science, literature, history, Language arts, fine arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Current events—famous speakers, speeches, famous literature, poetry, historical literature</td>
<td>Political science, language arts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Examples of Approximation Behaviors Related to the TESOL Standards

Pre-K–3 students will:
- listen to and illustrate details from text read aloud.
- collaborate to re-create text in writing after hearing it read aloud.

4–8 students will:
- verbally negotiate with peers to re-create text that has been read to them.
- listen to and analyze contributions from peers in re-creating text that they have heard.

9–12 students will:
- verbally negotiate with peers to re-create text based on listening and content knowledge background.
- collaborate to re-create complex text in writing after hearing it read aloud.

References